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LOWEST IN EIGHT YEARS

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Russia shot down aircraft: President

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ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Common polls & representative democracy

Bill has lapses that affect democratic fabric

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RAZOR'S EDGE

Fourth BGT Test evenly poised

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AAP, BJP trade charges of voter list fraud in Delhi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Arvind Kejriwal

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday accused each other of manipulating the Delhi electoral roll in an attempt to win the Assembly election due to be held in February.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal accused the BJP of trying to manipulate the voter list in the New Delhi Assembly constituency to win the election by "unfair" means. AAP Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said the BJP was even trying to get his wife's name deleted from the list.

Hitting back, the BJP said that it would not allow fake votes to be cast in Delhi. It claimed to have provided multiple pieces of evidence, and accused Mr. Kejriwal of attempting to cover his "wrongdoings" by creating confusion among the people.

"Today, I want to present some data from my New Delhi assembly constituency. BJP's 'Operation Lotus' began in this constituency on December 15. In just 15 days, they submitted nearly 5,000 applications for vote deletions and 7,500 applications for new additions," Mr. Kejriwal said at a press conference, claiming they were all bogus.

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179 killed as South Korean jet hits wall after crash-landing

Rescuers find only two survivors in the wreckage of the Bangkok-Muan flight; authorities say the airport control tower had issued a bird strike warning as the plane was about to land; pilot sent out a distress signal just before the accident

Agence France-Presse
Associated Press
MUAN/SEOUL

A Jeju Air plane carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea crashed on arrival on Sunday, smashing into a barrier and bursting into flames, killing everyone aboard except two flight attendants.

The aircraft crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 km south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 a.m. local time.

A total of 179 people – 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders were not immediately identifiable – were killed in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in a life-threatening condition.

Fatal landing: Firefighters and rescue teams work at the wreckage of a passenger plane, of which only the tail assembly remained recognisable, at the Muan International Airport on Sunday. GETTY IMAGES

Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage.

Mr. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds.

Transport Ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records showed the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the crash, officials said.

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INCIDENTS ON A LOOP
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NEARBY

White-topping project faces opposition

BENGALURU
The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has embarked on a phased white-topping project, covering a total of 157 kilometres of roads across the city. » Page 5

KSRTC staff drop strike plan

BENGALURU
After being promised a meeting with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on January 15, the KSRTC Employees Joint Action Committee, which had announced an indefinite strike from December 31, withdrew the strike call. » Page 6

EDUCATIONPLUS » PAGE 9

Kenneth Juster

'Expect tariff hikes, FTA push in new Trump era'

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India should expect raised tariffs and a renewed push to get a free trade agreement finalised as Donald Trump gets set to begin a second term as U.S. President, says former U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. Juster, a former U.S. Department of Commerce official who was appointed by Mr. Trump to India in the first term (2017-2021), said Mr. Trump's first term and campaign pronouncements were indicators that the second term would see a further strengthening of India-U.S. ties, but certain irritants in ties, such as high tariffs, market access in areas such as "agricultural exports from United States to India and the IT equipment sector and medical devices", and differences over Iran policy could return.

In Mr. Trump's first term, the U.S. had withdrawn India's GSP status for exporters, and forced India to cancel all oil imports from Iran.

He said Mr. Trump's Cabinet nominees had strong pro-India positions.

INTERVIEW ON
» PAGE 13

Humpy's win caps India's 2024 chess dominance

P.K. Ajith Kumar

India's great year in chess became greater on Sunday as Koneru Humpy won the women's World Rapid Chess Championship in New York. This is the second world rapid title for the 37-year-old from Vijayawada.

And this is the second world chess title of the month for India as D. Gukesh had lifted the World Championship Trophy in Singapore just two weeks ago.

Back in September, India's men's and women's teams were the champions at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest.

Ms. Humpy emerged as the champion in New York, scoring 8.5 points from 11 rounds. The final round had begun with seven players tied on 7.5 points, but among them only Ms. Humpy won, against Indonesia's Irene Sukandar, making her the outright champion.

Shortly after her victory, Ms. Humpy told *The Hindu* over phone from New York that the title meant a lot to her. "This is one of the most cherished titles for me, as I wasn't among the favourites here," she said.

Erigaisi fifth

D. Harika tied for second place, but was placed fifth after tie-breakers were applied. It was a disappointing day for India in the Open section, though.

Arjun Erigaisi, who had begun the day as one of the joint leaders, could only finish fifth, with nine points, 1.5 points behind the champion, 18-year-old Volodar Murzin of Russia.

MORE REPORTS
» PAGE 17

Snowed in

Off track: Tourists gather around a bus that had veered off a snow-laden road near the Patnitop hill station in Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday. The snowfall since Friday evening in the Union Territory is dubbed as one of the heaviest in recent memory. PTI

Youth blows himself up with gelatin stick in Mandya village

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

A 21-year-old youth blew himself up with a gelatin stick in front of the house of a girl with whom he was in love, at Kalenahalli village in Mandya district early on Sunday.

Ramachandra, 21, who was reportedly upset with the girl's family for rejecting him, turned up in front of her house around 3.30 a.m. on Sunday and exploded the gelatin stick with a detonator, leading to his instantaneous death.

After receiving information from villagers, the jurisdictional police from Nagamangala reached the spot and shifted the body to Adichunchanagiri Institute of Medical Sciences for the post-mortem.

Superintendent of Police, Mandya, Mallikarjun Baladandi, who confirmed the incident, said Ramachandra had been booked under a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act case and served a jail term for having a relationship with a minor girl.

He had been released from jail recently and even entered into a compromise with the girl's family, he said, adding that the girl was still a minor.

The girl's family, which was averse to a relationship with Ramachandra, was believed to be planning the girl's marriage after she attained the legal age. Ramachandra, who is a resident of a neigbouring Basaveshwaranagara village in Nagamangala taluk, is believed to have resorted to the bizarre act after the girl's family rejected him.

Mr. Baladandi said the police were investigating the source of gelatin stick used by Ramachandra to blow himself up.

However, it has been learnt that there are a number of quarries in the region. After Ramachandra's body was shifted for post-mortem, senior police officials and a forensic team visited the spot for further investigation.

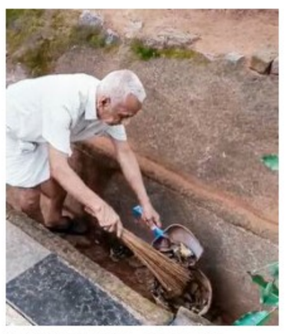
(Those in distress or having suicidal tendencies can call Arogya Sahayavani on Ph.: 104 for help)

Unsung hero: 83-year-old keeps his street in Bengaluru spotless

Shreyas H.S.
BENGALURU

For over a decade, Madhusudan V., a resident of HSR Layout, had been curious about the spotless street he often strolled along. A few days ago, he finally discovered the secret – an 83-year-old man dedicates two hours every day to sweeping the street.

Meet Suryanarayana, a retired automobile professional who moved to Bengaluru from Sringeri in 2001. For the past 20 years, this has been his unwavering routine. "I simply cannot sit idle and watch my street remain unclean," he explains.



Suryanarayana, a retired automobile professional, cleaning the street in HSR Layout in Bengaluru. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

This is not to say that civic workers neglect their duties. They used to clean the street when he first started his own sweeping efforts, and they continue to do so regularly. However, Suryanarayana, now 83, still hits the streets every morning, diligently sweeping a 150-metre stetch.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Suryanarayana said he always strives to keep himself engaged, and this activity, now an integral part of his daily routine, brings him immense joy.

"Apart from the street, I also clean the shoulder drains in all seasons. During the monsoon, silt accumulates in the drain, and I manually desilt it. The mud collected from the drain is then used to fertilise plant beds. This simply gives me immense satisfaction," he said. Most of the time, he is seen diligently removing fallen leaves.

When asked about civic workers, he acknowledged that BBMP workers visit the area frequently. However, he insists on continuing his own cleaning efforts regardless. He has vowed to continue this work for as long as he has the strength.

Mr. Madhusudan said this street is his favourite for walks because of its impeccable cleanliness. "Mr. Suryanarayana is a true example of how to be connected to our surroundings," he said.

I will be smarter and go for the top-50

Tennis is a very lonely sport and you just have to keep doing your own thing; I wish I also had some Indian friends playing in the upper tier; it is nice to see two or three people at a bigger event and share the biggest stage; I wish I was taller but if I can be physically fit and mentally strong, I will be doing well

REUTERS

INTERVIEW

SUMIT NAGAL

N. Sudarshan

Sumit Nagal had a mixed 2024. At the Australian Open, he came through the qualifiers and stunned the then World No. 27 Alexander Bublik in the first round, and in February, he broke into the ATP top-100 for the first time. In April on the Monte Carlo clay, he started in the qualifying rounds and nearly entered the round of 16 before losing narrowly to Holger Rune (No.7) in three sets. Propelled by a trophy and a runner-up finish in consecutive Challengers in June – again on his beloved red dirt – he got to a career-best ranking of No. 68 in mid-July.

But the 27-year-old's lack of success at the other three Slams – French Open, Wimbledon and US Open – will rankle him, and so will his 1-11 win-loss record on the Tour starting from the Paris Olympics.

There was also the controversy regarding his non-availability for the Davis Cup World Group I tie against Sweden in September – an issue he did not want to comment on – that India lost badly (0-4). As the 2025 season looms, Nagal, now ranked 98th in the World, told *The Hindu* in an interview that he was confident of learning from the experiences of the last 12 months and making a push for the ATP top-50. **Excerpts:**

Since breaking into the top-100, you have managed to stay there. How do you describe your season?

I feel like I played two different seasons. The first seven months were different, and around the US Open and post-US Open, things were different. The first few months I was really fit and playing well. The confidence was high and I really enjoyed being on the court. Once my back gave up a bit, and I really couldn't find out what the reason was, the training became less and there was a lot of worrying on the court. I lost track a little there.

You competed at all four Majors, a first in your career. Then, you played a few Masters tournaments which included your Monte Carlo high, a few ATP 500s and 250s. What were the biggest learnings from being in the upper tier?

If I am talking about playing the higher-ranked opponents, [I learnt that] you have to be on top of your game because the margin is very less. Everyone serves well, hits well, moves well. So, you have to show that you are ready to fight and play the first and last points at the same high level. That's the difference I feel from Challengers to the ATP Tour. You don't get so many free points [on the Tour].

How do you rate yourself? Do you feel you belong to this stage?

Definitely. I very much believe that I belong in the top-100. I will back myself for it. I just have to be a little smarter in a few things, like scheduling, fitness routines... if that is done, I should be okay.

You are the only Indian playing in singles in the bigger events. Do you feel the pressure?

Not really. I just feel sad. I wish I also had some Indian friends playing. It is nice to see two, three people at a bigger event, share the biggest stage and share some dinners. It gets very lonely otherwise. Obviously, in tennis, things don't change overnight. I really hope there's a time when we have two or three people playing at a very high level.

You have put together winning streaks in Challengers. Earlier in 2024, you won the title in Chennai and reached the semifinals in Bengaluru in back-to-back weeks. What does it take to replicate something similar at the Tour level? What is the gulf in challenge that you're looking at?

It's very similar if you look at the physical side of things. You have to be fit because matches are getting longer and harder. There were a few times in the ATP 250s where I felt like I should have won, but didn't. So, instead of losing in the second round or round of 16 on a Thursday, I could have gone deeper in the tournament. There was a match where I was serving 40-love up and ended up losing. Then there was one where I was a set and a break up and lost. If I could have turned around those, the year would have been very different. But it's fine. It's my first experience. Obviously, I can't expect a good draw all the time and sometimes I have to take it up as a challenge.

How does your game measure up to the prevailing standards in men's tennis? We see players getting bigger and taller...

I wish I was taller. I really wish. But then, I cannot change that. So, for me, to give myself a chance, it is to be like how David Ferrer was. I have tried to copy him. If I can be physically fit and mentally strong, fighting for every ball, making that extra ball all the time, I will be doing well.

Game-wise, what have you worked on? What do you have to get better at?

I'm practising a lot of serves, backhands and transitions to the net. These three are my biggest goals. I am getting better, but there's a lot of room to upscale.

When you play at big tournaments, you meet a lot of top players. What have you learnt from them?

When the top players get the racquet on the ball, they don't miss. It is incredible how they do it because it is super tough. They hit it hard and they don't miss. It's very simple to say but tough to do. That's where the difference comes. People who are able to do it will go high up the rankings. I played the World Tennis League in Abu Dhabi last year too and that was probably the first time I got to see so many top-ranked players. It was the same thing with everyone – if they have the racquet in position, they do not miss.

What do you think was the high point of 2024? And what could you have done better?

To be able to compete for many months. For almost a year and a half, nothing major happened to me and I was on the court practising and getting better. That was really good. In the past, I couldn't really play for the whole year. It was on and off, and that didn't give me the chance to play at the highest level. Towards the end of 2023, I knew I was playing really good tennis. I was eager and hungry to start the next year.

Are you feeling the same now?

Yes. I'm actually looking forward to it. I've never enjoyed going to Australia but since the beginning of 2024, my perspective has changed.

What did that one win against Bublik tell you?

I don't think it was just that one match. It was the whole tournament. It felt like I had figured out how to play on those courts. When I was young, I struggled quite a bit. But now, I am more comfortable playing in those conditions. If I enjoy the conditions, nothing matters to me.

How do you maintain your focus? You have dealt with many injuries in the past. Recently, the never-ending controversy regarding Davis Cup selection flared up again...

Nothing, to be honest. You just keep doing your own thing. Tennis is a very lonely sport. It doesn't really bother me because I have bigger and better things to do, and I have to improve so much on my game that my whole focus goes towards it.

Have you set any targets for 2025? What do you want to improve on?

I would love to break into the top-50. I'm going to push for it because 2024 was a good learning experience. It was the first time playing the ATP calendar. In the coming season, I'll be smarter with scheduling and I'll go for the top-50.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

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The PSLV-C60 rocket ahead of its launch on December 30, 2024. ISRO

All eyes on PSLV-C60 mission as ISRO looks to end 2024 on a high

The PSLV-C60 flight is scheduled for 9.58 pm on December 30, 2024. The rocket will carry two satellites called SDX01, dubbed 'Chaser,' and SDX02, dubbed 'Target.' Each weighs 220 kg. After launch and orbit insertion, the two satellites will rendezvous in low earth orbit, dock, and then undock

INDIA IN SPACE

Pradeep Mohandas

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) hopes to end 2024 on a high with an exciting mission on the launch pad to test technologies that will one day be used for interplanetary and human spaceflight. It also hopes to kickstart preparations for human spaceflight missions that have already been delayed for years.

Mission updates

PSLV-C59: The PSLV-C59 mission dedicated to NewSpace India Ltd. (NSIL) placed the European Space Agency's (ESA) Proba-3 spacecraft – short for 'Project for Onboard Autonomy' – into a highly elliptical orbit of 600 km x 60,500 km as planned 18 minutes after liftoff. The liftoff was from the Satish Dhawan Space Center's first launch pad at 4:04 pm IST on December 5. This mission demonstrated the ability of ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) to launch a spacecraft into such orbits.

After the launch, the ESA said the Yatharagga station in Australia began receiving telemetry from the satellite "almost immediately after separation." The telemetry will be passed on to the ESA's mission control centre in Belgium.

Gaganyaan: Ahead of its experimental flight of Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM-3) X in 2014, ISRO had wanted to test the vehicle's ability to fly through the thickest part of the earth's atmosphere. The organisation designed a suborbital flight for this with an altitude of 126 km and a range of 1,600 km from Satish Dhawan Space Centre. The vehicle didn't carry a cryogenic engine in its third stage and didn't reach earth orbit by design.

The LVM-3 X test flight also tested the reentry characteristics of the crew module using the Crew-module Atmospheric Re-entry Experiment (CARE). On December 18, 2014, the CARE module re-entered the earth's atmosphere after separating from the rocket and performed a controlled landing in the Bay of Bengal using its thrusters and parachutes. This successful mission was an important precursor to India's human spaceflight mission.

Ten years later, on the same day, December 18, 2024, ISRO began assembling the human-rated LVM-3 (HLVM-3) for its first uncrewed mission. This was done by stacking the nozzle end segment of the S-200 solid rocket motor with the full flex seal nozzle at 8.45 am on December 18. This marked the official launch campaign for the HLVM-3 G1/OM-1 mission. 'G1' stands for the first Gaganyaan mission, and 'OM-1' for the first orbital module mission. The orbital module consists of the crew module and a service module.

PSLV-C60 SpaDeX

Just like the CARE mission preceded the human spaceflight mission, the SpaDeX – short for 'Space Docking Experiment' – is a predecessor to ISRO's Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) and the Chandrayaan-4 missions. SpaDeX will demonstrate in-orbit docking.

The year 2024 began with a PSLV flight and looks like it will end with one as well. The PSLV-C60 flight is currently scheduled for 9.58 pm on December 30, 2024. The rocket will carry two satellites called SDX01, dubbed 'Chaser,' and SDX02, dubbed 'Target.' Each weighs 220 kg. After launch and orbit insertion, the two satellites will rendezvous in low earth orbit, dock, and then undock.

In addition, the fourth stage of the PSLV-C60 rocket will carry 20-plus payloads of its own, designed by various ISRO centres, academic institutions, and Indian private companies. After inserting the satellites in orbit, the fourth stage will enter an orbit of its own, where its payloads will perform various tests.

The PSLV-C60 mission will fly the rocket in its core alone configuration (called CA): i.e., its first stage will fly without its strap-on boosters.

The 'Chaser' and 'Target' satellites will be placed in a 470-km-wide circular orbit with an inclination of 55°. The duo will also have different velocities such that the gap between them increases to 10-20 km after a day.

The propulsion system on board the 'Target' satellite will be used to slow it down to the same speed as the 'Chaser' over time. They will eventually maintain a distance of 20 km in the same orbit heading up to the SpaDeX mission's first milestone, called far rendezvous. Then they will move closer such that the gap drops to 5 km, 1.5 km, 500 m, 225 m, 15 m, and finally 3 m. Then 'Chaser' and 'Target' will dock.

After a rigid mechanical connection is realised between the two satellites, electrical power transfer between 'Target' and 'Chaser' will be demonstrated before they undock and drift apart.

They will then operate their on-board payloads with a mission life of two years. The 'Chaser' has a high-resolution camera. The 'Target' has a miniature multispectral payload and a radiation monitor. Earlier, an Indian private space company named Ananth Technologies became the first of its kind to integrate and test the two satellites.

The PSLV-C60 launch vehicle after integration with Chaser and Target ahead of its launch on December 30. ISRO- X

POEM's two dozen payloads

PSLV-C60's fourth stage, called the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM-4), carries 24 payloads: 14 contributed by various ISRO centres and 10 by academia and private industry. POEM-4 will begin operations after satellite separation.

Of these, the Relocatable Robotic Manipulator-Technology Demonstrator, a.k.a. the 'Walking Robotic Arm,' developed by ISRO Inertial Systems Unit (IISU), is expected to demonstrate a robotic arm that can move to defined targets on the POEM using an inchworm walking technique.

The Vikram Sarabhai Space Center (VSSC) developed the Debris Capture Robotic Manipulator. In a proof of concept, it will attempt to capture tethered space debris with a robotic manipulator. The VSSC also built the Compact Research module for Orbital Plant Studies to study the germination and growth of eight cowpea seeds in a five- to seven-day experiment in a controlled environment.

The other experiments from ISRO centres include – to quote from a press release – the Gradient Control Reaction Wheel Assembly (IISU), the Multi-Sensor Inertial Reference System with in-house gyroscopes (IISU), the MEMS-based High Angular Rate Sensor (VSSC), the Lead Exempt Experimental System (VSSC), the Highly Configurable Onboard Common Controller (Space Physics Laboratory), and the PILOT-G2 payload (Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology) "that hopes to qualify in-house equipment for small satellites."

One experiment of note is the Amity Plant Experimental Module in Space (APEMS) payload developed by Amity University, Mumbai. It will compare growth-related changes in plant callus cells using spinach plants (*Spinacia oleracea*) in microgravity and earth gravity. For this, two parallel experiments will be carried out – one on POEM 4 and the other at Amity University.

Another biological payload of note is the RVSat-1 developed by R.V. College of Engineering, Bengaluru. It will measure the growth of the gut bacterium *Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron* in space. The experiment is expected to provide data to understand human physiology in space and astronaut health during crewed missions.

There are two notable communications payloads called the BGS Amateur Radio Payload for Information Transmission (ARPIT) and Swetchasat. BGS ARPIT was developed by the S.J.C. Institute of Technology, Karnataka, and the Upagraha Amateur Radio Club at the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre. It can transmit audio, text, and images from a satellite to the ground with frequency modulation in the VHF band. It is designed to provide amateur radio satellite services worldwide.

The Swetchasat payload, developed by Nspace Tech, a private entity in Andhra Pradesh, plans to demonstrate an onboard UHF transmitter's capability to store data and establish a communication link and transmit data and telemetry with the ISRO Telemetry and Tracking Command ground station.

On December 18 ISRO began assembling the LVM-3 for its first uncrewed mission. This was done by stacking the nozzle end segment of the S-200 motor with the full flex seal nozzle at 8.45 am. This marked the official launch campaign for HLVM-3 G1/OM-1

There are two propulsion payloads developed by private industry. RUDRA 1.0 HPGP, developed by Bellatrix Aerospace, will test a green propulsion system with a thrust of 1 newton and a specific impulse of 220 seconds. Likewise, the VYOM 2U developed by Manastu Space will test a monopropellant the company has said is a safer and better performing alternative to hydrazine, which is the most widely used propellant in the Indian space programme at present. VYOM has a thrust of 1.1 N and a specific impulse greater than 250 seconds.

Two payloads will also be hoping to demonstrate synthetic aperture radar (SAR) capabilities. SAR creates high-resolution images of objects on the ground by moving a radio-emitting antenna over the objects of interest. The SAR Imaging Demonstration Payload (GLX-SQ) from GalaxEye Space will test the generation, capture, and processing of SAR images in a space environment. The Varuna payload, from Piersight Space, will demonstrate SAR in a cubesat form factor and test the performance of seven advanced subsystems – including a deployable reflectarray antenna – that can help monitor all human and industrial activities at sea.

Finally, the MEMS-based Inertial Measurement Unit (STeRG-P1.0) was developed at the MIT World Peace University, Pune, and the MOI-TD by the private company TakeMe2Space. STeRG-P1.0 will perform attitude determination and higher efficiency data processing. The MOI-TD payload is a technology demonstrator planning to perform real-time data processing for earth observation. It will attempt to receive three machine learning models through an uplink from ground to orbit, conduct in-orbit computation, and downlink the models' inferences.

Onward to 2025

The year 2025 will be a pivotal year in Indian spaceflight with the launch of the first uncrewed HLVM-3 missions to orbit.

Indians will potentially get to see the sight of the first Indian in space since Rakesh Sharma in 1984 when Shubanshu Shukla flies – schedule permitting – to the International Space Station on board a Falcon 9 rocket as part of the Axiom 4 mission in 2025.

We will also have the launch of the innovative NASA-ISRO SAR mission.

In all, 2025 promises to be an action-packed and, by all means, a defining year for space for India.

(Pradeep Mohandas is a technical writer and space enthusiast in Pune. pradeep.mohandas@gmail.com)

(India in Space is a monthly column collecting and analysing developments in the country's space, spaceflight, and allied sectors.)

A pumpjack at an old oil field in Emlichheim, Germany. AP

Oil companies backtrack on renewables

Reuters

Major European energy companies doubled down on oil and gas in 2024 to focus on near-term profits, slowing down – and at times reversing – climate commitments in a shift that they are likely to stick with in 2025.

The retrenchment by oil majors comes after governments around the world slowed the rollout of clean energy policies and delayed targets as energy costs soared following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Big European energy companies that had invested heavily in the clean energy transition found their share performance lagging U.S. rivals Exxon and Chevron, which had kept their focus on oil and gas.

Against this backdrop, the likes of BP and Shell this year sharply slowed their plans to spend billions on wind and solar power projects and shifted spending to higher-margin oil and gas projects.

BP, which had aimed for a 20-fold growth in renewable power this decade to 50 gigawatts, announced in December it would spin off almost all its offshore wind projects into a joint venture with Japanese power generator JERA.

Shell, which once pledged to become the world's largest electricity company, largely stopped investments in new offshore wind projects, exited power markets in Europe, and China and weakened carbon reduction targets.

"Geopolitical disruptions like the invasion of Ukraine have weakened CEO incentives to prioritise the low-carbon transition amid high oil prices and evolving investor expectations," Rohan Bowater, analyst at Accela Research, told Reuters. He said BP, Shell, and Equinor reduced low-carbon spending by 8% in 2024.

Shell said it remained committed to becoming a net zero emissions energy business by 2050 and continues to invest in the energy transition.

Equinor said: "The offshore wind segment has been through demanding times in the last couple of years due to inflation, cost increase, bottlenecks in the supply chain, and Equinor will continue to be selective and disciplined in our approach."

European energy companies that had invested heavily in the clean energy transition found their share performance lagging U.S. rivals Exxon and Chevron, which stayed focused on oil and gas

BP did not respond to a request for comment.

The oil companies' retrenchment is bad news for efforts to mitigate climate change. Global heat-trapping carbon emissions are forecast to climb to a new high in 2024, which will be the warmest year on record.

And 2025 is shaping up to be another tumultuous year for the $3 trillion energy sector, with climate-sceptic Donald Trump returning to the White House. China, the world's biggest crude oil importer, is trying to revive its faltering economy, potentially boosting oil demand.

Europe faces continued uncertainty over the war in Ukraine and political turmoil in Germany and France.

All those tensions were laid bare at the annual United Nations climate conference in Azerbaijan in November, when the host country's President Ilham Aliyev hailed oil and gas as "a gift from god."

That summit yielded a global climate finance deal but disappointed climate advocates who had hoped governments would coalesce around a phase-out of oil, gas, and coal.

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Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of people arrested in crackdown on Assad loyalists

300 Syria's new authorities have arrested nearly 300 people, including informants, pro-regime fighters and former soldiers, in a crackdown on loyalists to former president Bashar al-Assad. The authorities intensified efforts to consolidate control. AFP

The number of years for which Chad was under military rule

3 Chad began voting on Sunday in a general election that is presented by the government as a key step towards ending military rule but has been boycotted by the opposition. Turnout was low in the capital N'Djamena when polling stations opened for voters to choose a new parliament. AFP

The extent of employee attrition in private banks

25 In per cent. Employee attrition in private sector banks has witnessed an increase to about 25% and this high turnover rate poses operational risk, according to the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24. Employee attrition rates are high across select private sector banks. PTI

Number of devotees expected to attend Maha Kumbh

40 crore. In a first, "underwater drones" capable of diving up to 100 metres will be deployed during the upcoming Maha Kumbh to provide round-the-clock surveillance at the Sangam area in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, the Culture Ministry said on Sunday. PTI

The length of the new extension of the Suez canal

10 km. Egypt has tested a new 10-kilometre (6.2-mile) extension to the Suez Canal as it tries to minimise the impact of currents on shipping and increase the key waterway's capacity. Two ships used the new extension on Saturday. AFP

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The challenge of holding judges accountable

The review mechanism for judges in India requires 'proved misbehaviour or incapacity' to be decided by a committee set up under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. This committee functions like a trial court, but is set in motion only after a successful attempt to impeach the judge is moved either in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha

LETTER & SPIRIT

Kunal Shankar

A speech delivered by Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court, that made apparent his biases against the Muslim community, at an event organised by the legal cell of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad within the Court precincts on December 8, has once again spotlighted the difficulty in India's review mechanism to hold judges of the higher judiciary accountable.

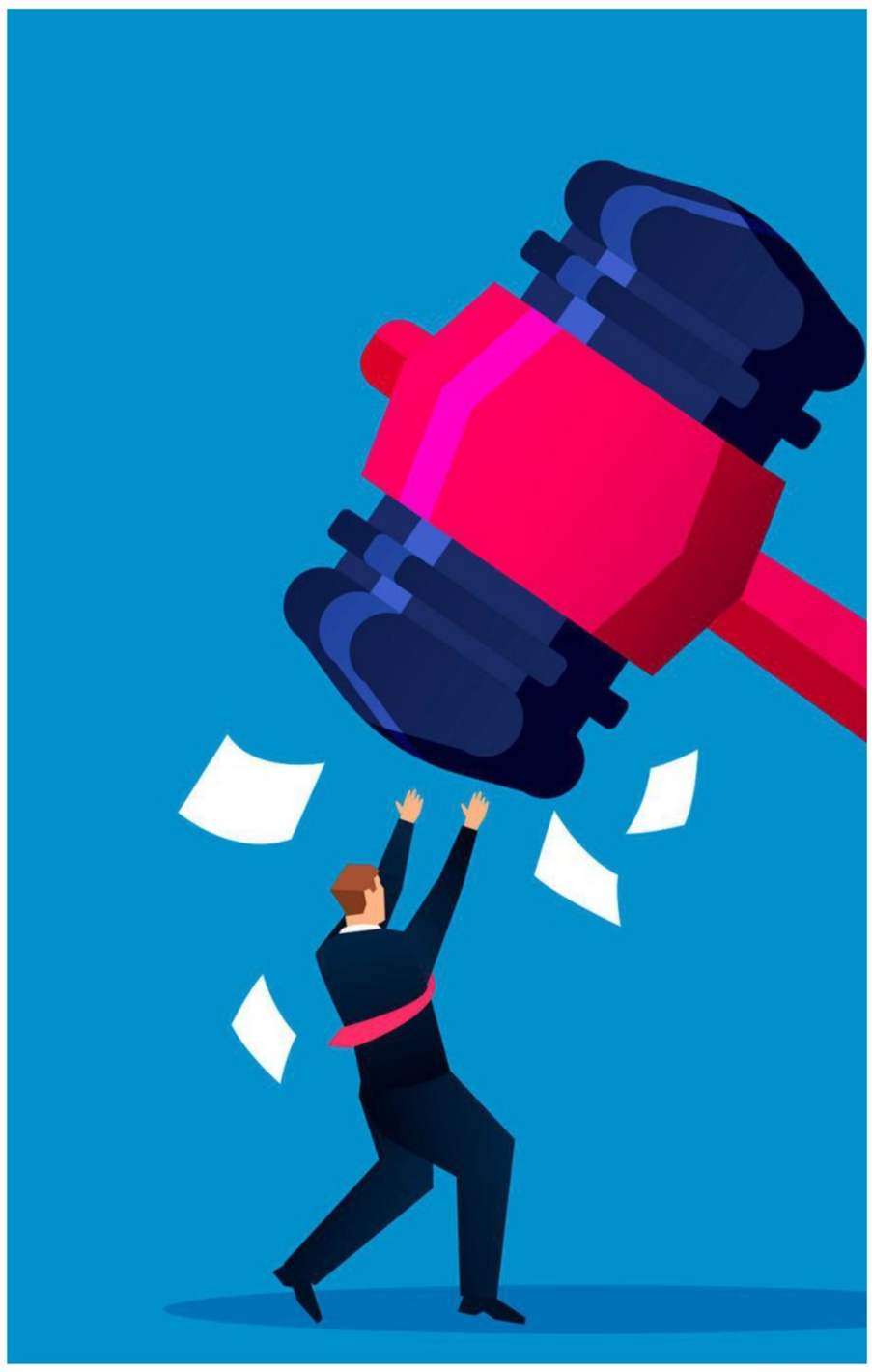
The review mechanism requires "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" to be decided by a three-member committee set up under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. This committee functions like a trial court, but is set in motion only after a successful attempt to impeach the concerned judge is moved either in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha, which must be approved by the presiding officer of the House – the Speaker in the case of the Lok Sabha, or the Vice-President/Chairman in case of the Rajya Sabha. The provisions for this mechanism flows from Articles 124 (4), (5), 217, and 218 of the Constitution of India, and the those of the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

Justice V. Ramaswami's trial

Only two judges out of seven so far, aside from Justice Yadav against whom impeachment has been attempted, have been found guilty for their "misbehaviour" by the three-member committee, which must comprise of a Supreme Court judge, a Chief Justice of a High Court and an eminent jurist.

The first was retired Supreme Court Justice V. Ramaswami, who was found guilty of extravagant spending on his official residence such as buying air conditioners, plush furniture and bedding, without following due process, much like the accusations made against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra by the ruling BJP last year. While such misdemeanours by current accounts of corruption seem like an arcane quibble over propriety, they nevertheless animated public discourse on a judge's conduct in the late 80s and early 90s. Such discussions led to the foundation of the 'Restatement of Values of Judicial Life' adopted by the Supreme Court on May 7, 1997, as the code of conduct for those holding high offices in judiciary.

Speaking to *The Hindu,* retired Madras High Court Justice K. Chandru, who played a pivotal role in the impeachment proceedings against Justice Ramaswami, recollected how the judge "bought 6+1 = 7 maces, one with a silver head to denote the Chief Justice's arrival and took it on a cargo plane in 1988, and not by rail," following his elevation as the Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. "There was no tendering process that was followed for the purchase of the maces," Justice Chandru added. He was referring to the colonial practice followed at the Madras HC where an orderly precedes a judge, to signal his arrival to ensure those in the hallway and the courthouse "maintain decorum". Justice Ramaswami deemed it fit to continue this practice at the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which did not have this practice as it was founded in independent India, much to the shock of his "brother judges". In his Tamil book, *I too became a judge*, Justice Chandru recalled a letter dated August 18, 1988, in which then Chief Justice V. Ramaswami's colleagues wrote "You will remember that most of us told you later



GETTY IMAGES

too that we are opposed to the introduction of maces. Maces are but a relic of the imperial past and out of tune with our socialistic pattern of society."

The adverse verdict by the three-member panel constituted under the Judges Inquiry Act against V. Ramaswami set the precedent of then CJI Sabyasachi Mukherjee deciding not to allocate any work to him in 1993. The failure of the impeachment motion in the Lok Sabha that year, did not lead to a reversal of the CJI's decision. No cases were listed for hearing before Justice Ramaswami's Bench until his retirement three years later.

Article 124 (4) of the Constitution stipulates that the panel's finding must be voted upon by Parliament. The motion requires either a two-thirds majority of present MPs voting in favour of the motion or an absolute majority in each House, for the judge to be removed. On May 10, 1993, of the 401 members present in the Lok Sabha, 196 voted for Ramaswami's removal. While no one voted against the motion, 205 abstentions by the ruling Congress ensured the defeat of the impeachment.

Resignation before accountability

The second judge to face an impeachment motion was Justice Soumitra Sen of the Calcutta High Court. Justice Sen became the first judge of India's higher judiciary who was voted to be removed by the Rajya Sabha by an overwhelming majority, but he resigned in September 2011, days before the motion was to be tabled in the Lok Sabha. Justice Sen was found guilty of misappropriating ₹33.23 lakh in a case in 1983, as a court-appointed receiver in his capacity as a lawyer, and misrepresenting facts before a Calcutta court.

Similarly, Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court, P.D. Dinakaran resigned on July 29, 2011, the day of the first sitting of the three-member panel constituted under the Judges Inquiry Act, to look into 16 charges, some of them as grave as appropriating more than 300 acres of lands from farmers in Tamil Nadu's Tiruvallur district, after he became a judge of the Madras High Court.

Such instances highlight that members of India's higher judiciary enjoy a disproportionately greater level of immunity when compared with even elected officials as they "continue to enjoy the perks of being a retired judge, like pension" and other benefits, said jurist Mohan Gopal, who was part of the three-member committee in the Dinakaran case. Such resignations abort the trial and subsequent impeachment, something not afforded to even sitting or former Chief Ministers, like in the case of Jayalalithaa in the disproportionate assets petition decided in 2014.

The Forum for Judicial Accountability (FJA) that led the campaign against judicial corruption in the Dinakaran case, wrote to the three-member committee on August 6 that year, seeking a continuation of the committee's investigations arguing that "the jurisdiction of the Committee is untouched by the factum of removal...". The FJA's contention was that there were two separate parts to the removal process of a justice – one that concerns finding guilt, which is governed by Article 124 (5) and the second, which is impeachment, which is governed by article 124 (4) and is within the jurisdiction of Parliament. "The purpose of impeachment is not merely removal from office, but a more substantial one about accountability to the people whose trust is alleged to be breached and whose confidence in judiciary needs to be reinforced," the FJA argued.

"Though Article 124(5) of the Constitution uses the words "removed from office" and is silent on the issue of disqualification from holding future office, the finding of guilt by the Committee and the subsequent proceedings in Parliament will have the effect of disqualifying the person from holding public office in future. It may be noted that Justice V.Ramasami having been found guilty by the Committee, continued to hold office as a judge of the Supreme Court and retired with all the benefits, taking advantage of the defeat of the impeachment motion. Post retirement he was appointed as Chairperson of the Tamil Nadu Law Commission," said FJA.

The need to complete proceedings

RTI petitions by former *Frontline* legal affairs editor, V. Venkatesan revealed that both jurist Mohan Gopal and the Chairman of the three-member panel retired justice Aftab Alam believed the work of the committee must continue. The RTI replies made public a set of correspondence between Mohan Gopal and the two members of the committee, and of the committee with the Rajya Sabha Chairperson Hamid Ansari. Mr. Venkatesan has included these letters as annexures to his 2014 book *Constitutional Condundrums: Challenges to India's Democratic Process*. In his August 15, 2011 letter to Justice Aftab Alam and J. S. Kehar, the then Chief Justice of the Karnataka HC, Mr. Gopal writes, "the resignation of Justice P.D. Dinakaran presents our Committee with an unprecedented situation. Any decision we take will have a profound and far-reaching impact on the framework for judicial accountability in our country – both in terms [of the] future implementation of the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968, and in terms of the manner in which the current Constitutional and legal framework for judicial accountability is reformed....While undoubtedly the investigation and the proof stage arises only when there is a prayer for removal from office and is the essential first step or that purpose, it would be an error to ignore the independent role and value of the investigation and proof part of the process in and by itself... A view that the resignation would result in the investigation and proof process being aborted would in effect place in the hands of the judge who is the object of the investigation the power to end the investigation against him by resigning – an absurd situation that the legislature could not have intended. In such circumstances, there would be no incentive arising from this process for any judge to avoid misbehaviour as any judge can end investigation into charges against him at any point by resigning from office."

While the Chair justice Aftab Alam concurred and sought the continuation of the Committee, the request was rejected by Rajya Sabha Chairman Hamid Ansari.

THE GIST

- Only two judges so far have been found guilty for their "misbehaviour" by the three-member committee, which must comprise of a Supreme Court judge, a Chief Justice of a High Court and an eminent jurist.
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- Such instances highlight that members of India's higher judiciary enjoy a disproportionately greater level of immunity when compared with even elected officials as they "continue to enjoy the perks of being a retired judge, like pension" and other benefits, said jurist Mohan Gopal.

Seized elephant tusks linked to Bannerghatta forest godown

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Elephant tusks that were seized. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The two elephant tusks seized from a farmer in Tamil Nadu by Karnataka CID Forest Cell is suspected to have been stolen from Bannerghatta forest godown from among the tusks seized by the Forest Department. However, Bannerghatta National Park officials say a recent audit of the godown revealed everything was intact, raising several questions.

CID Forest Cell's mobile squad officials recently caught Nakulaiah, 30, a farmer in Krishnagiri district of Tamil Nadu, while trying to sell two tusks weighing 8.1 kg.

Tusks marked SC

A senior official said they found 'SC' written on the tusks with red ink, leading them to suspect that it was seized by a government agency, and the revelations made by the accused also matched their suspicion.

During his interrogation, he told officials he had sourced the tusks from his elder brother Chinnaiah, who was a forest watcher at BNP for two months earlier this year. Chinnaiah brought two tusks when he quit and buried them in the backyard, asking Nakulaiah to sell them, and share the profit equally. In November, their father passed away. Chinnaiah left the village after a tiff with their neighbours leaving Nakulaiah to bear all expenses of the last rites, pushing him into debt. To clear his debt, he dug up the tusks and tried to sell them.

Following this, the CID Forest Cell officials reported the incident to BNP, which reportedly audited all the seized items and concluded that everything was safe.Another senior forest official said Chinnaiah was asked to investigate allegations of his links with poachers. He said the forest officials do not use the particular mark 'SC', which is inscribed on the tusks.

Stolen during transit?

Forest Cell sources said BNP officials store seized wildlife articles in the store room for a few days for paperwork until it is handed over to Wildlife Forest Godown at Jalahalli. "During this transit, it is now suspected that employees steal the articles and hand them over to their network," an official said.

Meanwhile, in September this year, the investigation into two missing pieces of ivory from Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalur, Chennai, revealed a racket of insiders selling seized ivory on the black market. Authorities suspect that nearly a tonne of ivory had gone missing from the zoo. The stolen ivory, similarly marked, is believed to be circulating among wildlife smugglers, with enforcement agencies recovering pieces of this consignment in multiple cases across the State in recent months.

BMTC passengers raise concerns over faulty LED display systems in buses

Many elderly passengers struggle to locate the correct bus stops as the information is often unclear on the display boards

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) bus commuters are increasingly frustrated by malfunctioning LED display boards and audio announcement systems in the buses. These features, designed to provide real-time information about upcoming stops, are frequently non-functional, leaving passengers in the dark about their destinations.

The LED displays either remain switched off or fail to update the stop information entirely. K. MURALI KUMAR

Newcomers

Many elderly passengers, especially those travelling at night, struggle to locate the correct bus stops as route boards indicating the origin, next stop information and destination are often unclear. The LED displays, which are meant to guide commuters, either remain switched off, display messages like "Welcome to BMTC" in English and Kannada, or fail to update stop information entirely.

"This system was a lifeline for people like me," says Meera Narayan, a 65-year-old regular BMTC user from Banashankari. "The LED boards used to announce stops in Kannada and English, helping us to navigate easily. Now, with most of them broken, I often have to rely on fellow passengers to know when to get off," she said.

The problem is not limited to elderly passengers. People with disabilities and those unfamiliar with the city also find the lack of clear guidance challenging. Instances of commuters missing their stops or disembarking at the wrong location have increased, according to daily commuters.

"The absence of functional display boards is a major issue for newcomers like me. Without clear announcements or displays, I've missed my stop multiple times. It's stressful, especially when travelling at night," said Manoj Kumar, a software engineer who recently moved to Bengaluru.

Addressing the issue

BMTC officials, however, claim that the situation is under control. An official from the IT management cell explained that LED displays and voice announcement systems are reviewed regularly.

"If they are not functioning, it's usually a temporary issue, and repairs are undertaken as soon as discrepancies are identified," official added.

Despite these assurances, commuters feel the issue persists without any substantial resolution. Frequent users recall a time when the system worked seamlessly, providing audio announcements in both Kannada and English along with updated stop information on the displays.

Non-functional LED boards at bus stops leave commuters in the lurch

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Bengaluru's effort to modernize its public transportation system through the installation of LED display boards at bus stops has encountered significant challenges. While these displays were set up at various bus stops, including Traffic and Transit Management Centres (TTMCs), many have now become non-functional, causing inconvenience and frustration for passengers.

A reality check by The Hindu in key locations such as Shantinagar TTMC, Majestic Bus Station, Banashankari, and Jayanagar showed that these LED boards, designed to display bus numbers, destinations, registration details, and estimated arrival times, now often show distorted information or remain completely blank.

At Majestic Bus Station, one of Bengaluru's busiest hubs, Shreya Kamal, a daily commuter, said, "I depend on these boards to know which bus to take. When they work, they are a blessing. But now, they're almost always blank or frozen. I've missed several buses because I didn't know they had arrived."

BMTC's ambitious plan involved integrating these displays with real-time GPS data. While some passengers rely on mobile apps like BMTC's Namma BMTC app, not everyone has access to smartphones or reliable internet. Meanwhile, BMTC officials said that they will address these issues and take steps to resolve them.

Language lines: The tug-of-war between Kannada and Hindi in Bengaluru

Yemen S.
BENGALURU

Bengaluru has historically been a melting pot of cultures, languages, and identities. Yet this diversity often sparks debate over language in the city. This year, it happened frequently, especially between Kannada and Hindi.

From the government's order that insisted on signboards in Kannada to altercations between auto drivers and non-Kannada-speaking passengers, there was much heated debate around language, often turning uncivil in the online space.

At the same time, a more conciliatory narrative also emerged, with initiatives to bridge the gap by teaching basic Kannada to "outsiders."

Azzu Sultan, an autorickshaw driver started an initiative to teach basic Kannada phrases to the passengers. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The conflict between the government's push to mandate Kannada usage on signboards and commercial establishments' resistance dates back to 2008, but it was at the fag end of 2023 that it saw a new push. On December 27, 2023, Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (KRV) took to the streets to "enforce" an announcement by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) that all signboards should have at least 60% Kannada and the rest in any language. It had set February 28, 2024, as the deadline to implement it. At least 50 complaints of vandalism had been lodged with the city police.

Rewind 2024

Heated debates and confusion on the issue continued in January 2024, and by February 28, most retailers and shopkeepers had made a change to their signboards.

The move by the BBMP was supported by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who started his political career as the chairman of Kannada Kavalu Samiti, the precursor of the Kannada Development Authority. But he insisted that the definition of "Kannadiga" was broad. "We consider not only those who have been born here but all those who have come here to eke out a living as Kannadigas," he said.

While policy issues were being sorted out, the issue of language saw many manifestations on the streets. There were many complaints of auto drivers insisting that passengers speak in Kannada and non-Kannada speakers being over-charged or refused rides. The auto driver-vs-non-Kannadiga debate got immense traction on social media. However, in October, an auto driver made a special effort to reach out to non-Kannadigas in the city. Azzu Sultan, an autorickshaw driver and content creator known as 'Auto Kannadiga,' started an initiative to teach basic Kannada phrases through a laminated placard stuck inside his auto. This helped his passengers navigate the city with simple Kannada. Azzu's initiative was appreciated across the city, and by November, Bengaluru Traffic Police also partnered with him to install these placards in 5,000 autorickshaws.

Biker perfoming wheeling booked

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The police booked a 21-year-old man for not wearing a helmet and performing a wheeling stunt near Thalaghattapura. The suspect has been identified as Naresh G., a contract employee of a private firm.

According to the police, Naresh was found wheeling and driving his scooter recklessly without a helmet at around 11.45 am on Sunday. The suspect was allegedly performing stunts on Anjanapura 80 feet Road. He is booked under Section 281 (rash driving or riding on a public way) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and relevant sections of the Indian Motor Vehicles Act.

City man drowns in sea

The Hindu Bureau
MANGALURU

A 45-year-old man from Shivajinagar in Bengaluru drowned in the sea at Someshwar, near Ullal, on Sunday. The Ullal police gave the name of the deceased as Sajjad Ali.

The police said that Sajjad Ali and 10 others were on a tour of different places in the State and came to Mangaluru on Sunday. After visiting Ullal Dargah, Sajjad Ali and his family members came to Someshwar beach. Sajjad Ali rushed into the sea seeing his brother's daughter struggling in the water and was also caught in the current. Local swimmers rescued him and he was taken to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead, the police said.

Swavalambane programme empowers rural women of State

It is a collaborative initiative between the NSRCEL (start-up incubator) of the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore and Sanjeevini

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Some of the products made by rural women entrepreneurs who were trained under Swavalambane programme. SPECIAL ARRAGEMENT

Shobharani, a resident of H. Basavanahalli village in Madhugiri taluk, Tumakuru district, launched a business venture called P.R.K. Products, dedicated to producing homemade papads. Inspired by her mother's culinary skills and driven by her own passion for cooking, Shobharani's business gradually grew through word-of-mouth, achieving an annual turnover of ₹5.76 lakh.

She then applied for and was selected for the Swavalambane programme, a collaborative initiative between the NSRCEL (start-up incubator) of the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) and Sanjeevini - Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Promotion Society.

Through the programme, Shobharani secured a grant of ₹10 lakh. The fund enabled her to purchase essential machinery and a solar drying unit, ensuring consistent production even during the rainy season. With further support from the programme in areas such as marketing and financial management, she significantly expanded her business, achieving an annual turnover of ₹14 lakh, a 143% increase from her initial earnings. "Swavalambane helped me transform my small home-based business into a thriving enterprise," she said.

Women entrepreneurs

Like Shobharani, 150 rural self-help group (SHG) women entrepreneurs from Karnataka participated in the first cohort of the Swavalambane programme, which ran from June 2022 to December 2024. The programme aimed to assist women-led, non-farm enterprises, primarily from tier 2 and tier 3 cities, in developing sustainable business models, increasing their revenues by at least 15%, and creating local employment opportunities. It also sought to formalise these businesses into legal entities with structured business models and improve their creditworthiness.

"Today, my operations are both efficient and in line with industry standards," said Priya Prakash Shet from Uttara Kannada district, who produces pineapple and kokum syrups under her enterprise, Ainkai Malnad Products and was also a participant in the programme.

In 26 districts

Out of 40,138 women entrepreneurs who applied for the programme, 150 were selected after rigorous evaluation across various parameters. This cohort comprised entrepreneurs from 26 districts across the State, representing 12 business sectors. The food and food products sector had the highest representation (54 entrepreneurs), followed by plate making and tailoring (17) and handicrafts (13).

One such entrepreneur is Roopa Gajendra Kolekar, from Uttara Kannada district. She runs Amba Oil Mill, which specialises in the production of cold-pressed oils, including coconut and castor oil.

Initially facing challenges in reaching customers and effectively marketing her products, Roopa received a soft loan of ₹3 lakh and valuable mentorship from the Swavalambane programme. This support enabled her to scale up her venture, doubling her annual turnover from ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh with a profit of ₹7 lakh.

Role model

The success stories emerging from the Swavalambane programme have prompted other States to express interest in extending the programme to their regions. "We have just completed the pilot at IIMB-NSRCEL and observed excellent results. Many States, including Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and several Ministries, have expressed interest in the programme. We are yet to decide on the expansion," IIMB NSRCEL informed *The Hindu*. For its next cohort, the programme will draw from its pool of 40,138 pre-screened applications, considering those who have progressed to the second, third, and fourth shortlisting levels.

New Year celebration: Strict action for violation of law

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Sunday said that no one should misbehave or violate the law during New Year's celebration and strict action will be taken against those who do.

"Everyone can either take this as a request or as a warning," the Minister said sternly while addressing reporters in M. Chinnaswamy Stadium. He added, "More than 10,000 cameras have been installed across Bengaluru, and movement of everyone will be monitored."

He further said, "The police have issued guidelines for the New Year celebrations. Law and order must be maintained in the state. The civic authority and the police will issue guidelines to businesses. Even if time extensions are granted, no one should violate the law."

The Minister also clarified that while a seven-day State mourning has been declared in respect of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, only government events will be restricted and the government will not stop private celebrations of New Year.

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From Gemini to Llama: how AI titans shaped the industry

In a relatively short span of time, AI has transformed from a novelty to an everyday tool. What are some of the notable advances in AI in 2024, and how did this tech become a common trope in such a short period?

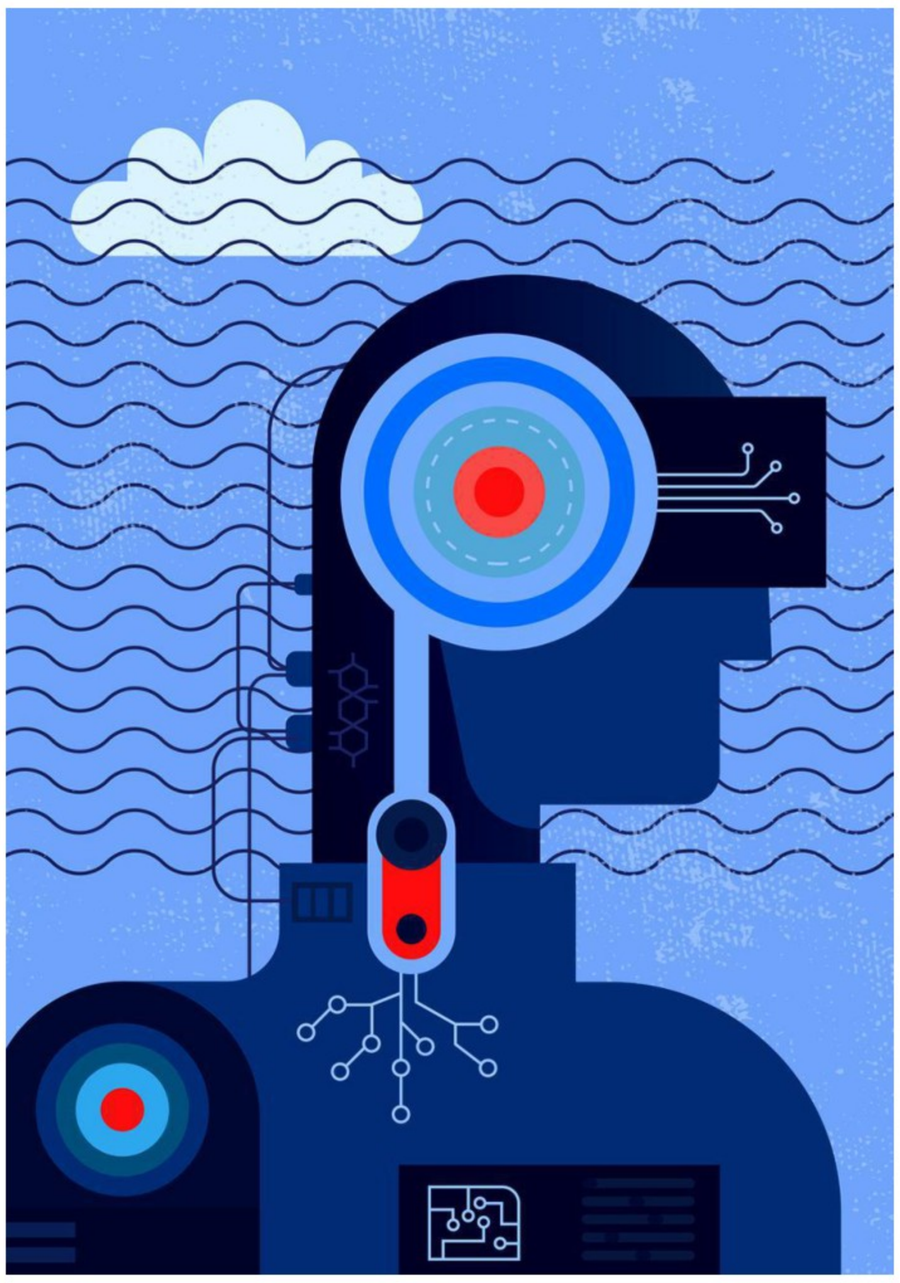
John Xavier

Artificial Intelligence (AI) was seen as novelty in 2023 with the launch of ChatGPT just a month before the start of that year. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, after investing $10 billion in OpenAI, threw down the gauntlet to Google, taunting the DeepMind owner to show what its AI could do. Google tottered with its half-baked Bard bot that spewed out inaccurate answers. In subsequent months, the Alphabet-owned company went through a baptism of fire and finally came out with a rechristened AI, Gemini, by the end of 2023.

Building on that momentum, the search giant steadily rebuilt its reputation and began infusing Gemini's capabilities in almost all of its products and services in 2024. Google's recent AI advances, including the second generation of Gemini, the Trillium AI accelerator chip, and breakthroughs in quantum computing with the Willow chip, have significantly boosted investor confidence, driving its stock price to a record high.

OpenAI did not give Google's Gemini an easy run. The competition between the two Silicon Valley giants was intense. Both the firms launched advanced AI models with improved reasoning capabilities.

OpenAI's o3 model built on top of its predecessor, o1, by focusing on enhanced reasoning skills, outperformed previous models in complex coding and advanced mathematics. Similarly, Google's Gemini 2.0 Flash Thinking model answered complex questions by outlining its thought process, enhancing the model's reasoning capabilities. OpenAI's o3 model, with its advanced reasoning capabilities, garnered more attention from Microsoft as the tech giant relies on OpenAI models for its AI assistant, Microsoft 365 Copilot. While o3 promises better performance, its increased cost and computation time are significant considerations for business applications.



GETTY IMAGES

Anthropic's Claude and Mistral AI

It wasn't just Google's turn-around this year. Product launches and updates from a clutch of other AI companies have, in some instances, stolen OpenAI's thunder this year. Amazon-backed Anthropic upgraded its AI model, Claude 3.5 Sonnet, with a "computer use" capability. That feature enables the AI to autonomously perform tasks such as moving the cursor, typing, and browsing the Internet, effectively automating complex computer interactions. This development aims to enhance productivity, particularly for software developers, by allowing the AI to execute multi-step actions with minimal human intervention.

Another area Anthropic made strides this year was in how it implemented safety measures. During the U.S. presidential election, with its Clio tool, it analysed AI usage to ensure responsible AI deployment. In another instance, the AI company allowed the U.K.'s AI Safety Institute to early-test its Claude 3.5 Sonnet model.

French AI company Mistral for its part brought in a certain level of transparency in AI with its open-weight models, including Mistral 7B and Mixtral 8x7B, designed for customisation and deployment across various applications. These models were available under open licences, promoting accessibility and innovation within the AI community. Mistral Large 2, the startup's flagship model, was integrated into IBM's Watsonx platform, offering enhanced capabilities in code generation, mathematics, and reasoning. In November, the France-based startup expanded into the U.S. by establishing an office in Palo Alto, California, a strategic move aimed at attracting top AI talent and enhancing the company's sales operations. Such moves show how Silicon Valley continues to be the epicentre for top tech talent.

Mistral AI also collaborated with Qualcomm to bring new generative AI models to devices powered by Snapdragon and Qualcomm platforms, indicating a focus on enhancing AI accessibility and performance in consumer electronics.

Meta's Llama

Meta's large language models (LLMs), while quite late to the AI race, aren't far behind. In some ways, Facebook's parent company can be credited for modularising AI models with its Llama models. In April, Meta released Llama 3, offering models with 8 billion (8B) and 70 billion (70B) parameters. These models were pre-trained on approximately 15 trillion tokens from publicly available sources, with fine-tuning on over 10 million human-annotated examples. With performance in coding, reasoning, and multilingual support, Llama 3 was positioned by Meta as an open-source AI model. In July, Llama 3.1 expanded the context windows for the 8B and 70B parameters models. Plus, it also launched a 405 billion (405B) parameter model. In September, Meta introduced Llama 3.2, featuring models with 1B, 3B, 11B, and 90B parameters. This version marked a significant milestone by incorporating multimodal capabilities, allowing the models to process both text and images. Additionally, Llama 3.2 was optimised for deployment on edge and mobile devices, broadening its applicability.

Llama models were gradually integrated into Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, enhancing user experiences with AI-driven features like real-time translation and content generation. By the end of 2024, Llama had received a wider adoption with over 650 million downloads, according to a company blog, citing downloads from Hugging Face.

Meta's Llama and Mistral AI are giving open-source alternatives to the OpenAI-style closed source AI models. Open-source models allow a broader audience to engage with AI technology, facilitating collaborative development and rapid innovation. This openness contrasts with the closed nature of proprietary models, which restrict access to underlying code and data.

Developers can customise open-source LLMs to specific needs, enhancing versatility across diverse applications. This adaptability is often limited in closed-source models due to proprietary restrictions. While open-source models offer benefits, they may face challenges in matching the performance and specialised capabilities of proprietary systems. Proprietary models often have access to extensive resources and data, enabling them to achieve higher performance in certain tasks. And success in AI is dependent on the kind of data the models are trained in.

On-device experience

In 2024, AI models were increasingly deployed across various devices to bring their capabilities closer to end-users, enhance functionality, and provide real-time experiences. For instance, in smartphones and tablets, Apple's Neural Engine, Qualcomm's Snapdragon AI Engine, and Google's Tensor chipsets were integrated with LLMs and vision models to power various tasks, including voice assistants like Siri and Google Assistant, real-time image processing for photo enhancements and augmented reality, and multimodal AI for speech, text, and image-based queries.

Apple's incorporation of AI features into its latest iPhones, such as Visual Intelligence and Image Playground, has revitalised consumer interest, contributing to a significant increase in iPhone sales. This integration has positioned Apple on the brink of becoming the first company to surpass a $4 trillion market capitalisation.

PC manufacturers are fully embracing AI by integrating AI accelerators such as NVIDIA GeForce RTX series GPUs, AMD Radeon chips, and Apple's M-series chips. These accelerators enable generative models and advanced features like AI-powered transcription and video editing tools, enhanced productivity tools, and gaming enhancements including real-time ray tracing and AI-driven non-playable characters (NPCs) to run on the device.

Talent is key

At the core of the current AI revolution lies a dual-engine system. One engine is responsible for training the data, while the other leverages the trained data to make inferences. To effectively operate these engines, hardware resources alone are insufficient. Human expertise plays a crucial role. This has become a pain point for OpenAI in particular as it has been bleeding top talent this year. A notable departure from the AI giant is co-founder Ilya Sutskever. The company also lost its chief technology officer Mira Murati, and several other leading computer scientists.

To make matters worse, some of the departing members are joining rivals. For instance, John Schulman, another OpenAI co-founder, moved to Anthropic. Mr. Schulman is a key leader in the creation of ChatGPT.

According to a BCG analysis of top skilled labour, AI experts are the most mobile at nearly 11 out 100 experts moving internationally every five years. So, where they go can make a big difference. Companies and countries that attract the best talent can gain a competitive edge in the tech world. Countries that are open to global talent tend to invent more and grow faster. As countries compete for leadership in AI, their ability to attract top talent is crucial for their success.

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

She has a chronic knee problem

The water is freezing for this time of year. Don't stay too long in the pool and catch a cold, capiche?

S. Upendran

"I feel great after playing three sets of tennis today. Surprisingly, I didn't see Malathy on court. I wonder if..."

"I don't find that surprising at all! The poor girl has a chronic back problem."

"What are you talking about? Malathy plays tennis almost every day. How can she do that with a serious back problem?"

"I said she has a chronic back problem, not a serious back problem."

"What's the difference?"

"A chronic problem is one that lasts for a long time. The problem doesn't go away easily."

"So, it's not a serious problem!"

"It needn't be a serious problem. A 'chronic' problem is one that persists. When I was growing up, there was always a chronic shortage of water during the summer months."

"I remember those days. How about this example? I'm told there's a chronic shortage of housing in some of our big cities."

"Sounds good! My grandmother has a chronic knee problem. Now then, do you..."

"When the problem is rather serious, what do you say?"

"You could consider using the word 'acute'. When you say that someone has an acute back problem, what you're suggesting is that it is rather bad. The individual is unable to do anything."

"So, the difference between 'acute' and 'chronic' is one of intensity."

"Also, duration. An acute problem does not usually last long. It is of short duration. We had an acute water shortage last year."

"The patient complained of acute abdominal pains."

"Good example! We need to..."

"I came across an interesting word yesterday. It was spelt c..a..p..i..c..h..e. Is the first syllable pronounced like the word 'cap'?"

"No, it isn't. The 'a' in the first syllable sounds like the 'a' in 'china', while the vowel in the second is pronounced like the 'ee' in 'feel', 'peel' and 'kneel'. The final 'che' sounds like the 'sh' in 'ship', 'sheet' and 'shoot'. The word is pronounced 'ke-PEESH' with the stress on the second syllable."

"I see. What does the word mean?"

"Capiche is mostly used in informal contexts. It comes from the Italian 'capisci' meaning 'do you understand'. In everyday conversation in English, this word usually comes at the end of a sentence. Don't discuss our plans with him, capiche?

"Just do whatever she tells you to. Don't ask any questions. Capiche?

"Good example! The word can also be spelt 'c..a..p..e..e..s..h'. Ramesh will probably ask for money. I don't want you to be lending him any. Capeesh?"

"Capeesh!"

upendrankye@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

A quiz on Koneru Humpy, the newly crowned Women's World Rapid chess Champion

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
Why did her parents Koneru Ashok and Latha initially name her Hampi and then change it to Humpy?

QUESTION 2
In which famous city known for its film festival did Humpy win the girls' under-10 title in 1997 for her first World crown?

QUESTION 3
In 2002, at the age of 15 years, 1 month and 27 days, she became the youngest woman ever to become a Grandmaster. Whose record did she break for the feat?

QUESTION 4
To whom did Humpy finish runner-up in the Women's World Chess Championship?

QUESTION 5
With which civilian award was Humpy honoured in 2007?

QUESTION 6
Prior to her win in New York, in which city and year did Humpy claim her first World Rapid title?

Visual question:
Which gold medal is Humpy showing off proudly? PTI

Questions and Answers to the December 27 edition of the daily quiz: 1. This person is well known for his scientific contributions related to milk and other notable discoveries related to chemistry. **Ans: Louis Pasteur**
2. December 27 started being observed as the International Day of Epidemic Preparedness in this year. **Ans: 2020**
3. This naturalist set sail on the _____ ship on December 27, 1831. **Ans: HMS Beagle**
4. The National Anthem was sung for the first time publicly at this session of the Indian National Congress. **Ans: In Calcutta in 1911**
5. The first woman to head a democratic government in a Muslim-majority country was assassinated on December 27, 2007. Name her. **Ans: Benazir Bhutto. She served for two terms**
Visual: Identify this astronomer. **Ans: Johannes Kepler. There is a telescope named after him**
Early Birds: Dodo Jayaditya| Barnali Biswas| Piyali Tuli| Sumana Dutta| Rajib Ganguly

Word of the day

lynchpin:
a central cohesive source of support and stability

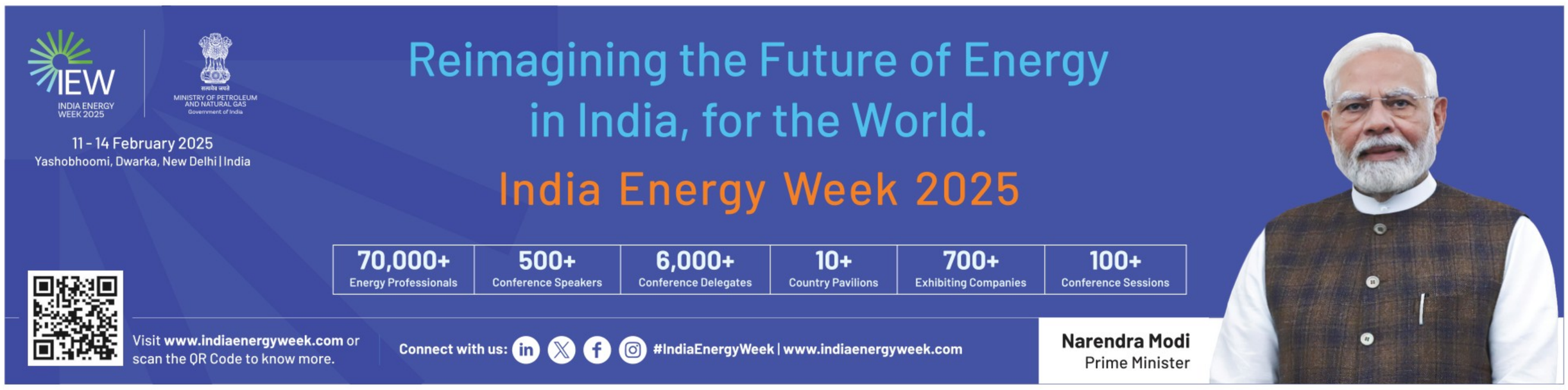
Synonyms: anchor, backbone, keystone, mainstay

Usage: *Teachers are the lynchpin of the education system.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/lynchpinpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈlɪnʧˌpɪn/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Text & Context'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Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

IIIT-B develops smart compost monitoring solution

Shilpa Elizabeth
BENGALURU

A team of students and faculty at the International Institute of Information Technology - Bangalore (IIITB) has developed a remote compost monitoring solution that would not only aid sustainable agriculture but also help reduce the city's garbage woes and bring down the manual labour involved in composting.

The team led by Jyotsna Bapat has built a prototype for an intelligent IoT system that remotely monitors and manages compost, which can be used as fertilizer.

"The garbage piles we see everywhere in Bengaluru have a lot of food waste in them. This can cause a lot of diseases. If composed correctly, the volume can come down by a factor of 10," says Prof. Bapat.

A stinking problem

Using compost made from organic waste as fertilizer can help improve soil health, reduce reliance on chemical fertilizers, and contribute to environmental conservation.

However, many urban dwellers refrain from using their kitchen waste for this process due to reasons such as a lack of space and the complexities involved.

"The reason a lot of people don't do it is that if certain parameters such as the temperature, the humidity or the water level inside go wrong, the composting doesn't complete, and then it starts smelling. This attracts bugs," explains Prof. Bapat, who herself composts wet waste on her balcony.

Manual labour

On a larger scale, companies that compost resort to manual labour, which involves a person checking and stirring the compost from time to time to ensure that the process happens successfully.

"We felt that somebody going in and checking a compost is not really the nicest job. We wondered if a machine could do this," notes Bapat.

The team's solution includes a sensor hub associated with each bin to monitor the compost's pH, temperature, humidity, and CO2 levels. The hub allows remote monitoring of these values and the generation of alerts using a mobile phone.

Large- scale composting

While anybody can use the solution, Prof. Bapat notes that currently the team is looking for those who are doing composting at a large scale. About 14-15 bins have been installed within the campus, and data is currently being collected.

"We already have a client. They are talking to different panchayats in the neighbourhood of Bengaluru. Before they deploy it there, we need to do a thorough testing at IIIT-B," Bapat notes.

RELATED STORY ON E-PAPER
» PAGE 7

White-topping project faces opposition from residents

Concerns range from perceived 'wasteful expenditure' to lack of public consultation and potential environmental impact

Shreyas H.S.
BENGALURU

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has embarked on a phased white-topping project, covering a total of 157 kilometres of roads across the city. The Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) has granted permission for work to commence on 48 stretches, with construction underway in several locations. This involves digging up roads to accommodate utility installations before laying concrete blocks.

However, this ambitious project has encountered significant opposition from residents in numerous areas. Concerns range from the perceived "wasteful expenditure" of public funds to the lack of public consultation and potential environmental impacts. A social media campaign, #WhitetoppingBeda, has even been launched to express dissent.

A file photo of road in Bengaluru being white-topped.

'Wasteful expenditure'

In Sanjaynagar, residents have initiated the #WhitetoppingBeda campaign against the planned white-topping of a 3.5-kilometre stretch of Sanjaynagar Main Road. Vignan Gowda, a local resident, highlighted that this road was recently reconstructed at a cost of ₹13 crore just five years ago, involving a joint effort between the BBMP and the Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT).

"We have pressing civic issues, such as inadequate parking space, that require immediate attention," stated Mr. Gowda. "The funds allocated for white-topping could be more effectively utilised to address these critical concerns."

The Hindu recently reported an instance in the Chamarajpet Assembly constituency. Work orders for asphalting seven roads were issued on February 2, 2024 at a cost of ₹23 crore. On the very same day, tenders were issued for white-topping these very same roads at a significantly higher cost of ₹98 crore.

Sriramegowda, president of the Chamarajpet Nagarikara Okkuta, accused the civic body of violating its own regulations, which prohibit the digging of newly asphalted roads for any reason within a three-year period. He demanded the immediate withdrawal of the white-topping work order, deeming the project a "wasteful expenditure" given the recent asphalt work.

Toll on business

Vinod K., a liquor shop owner on Church Street, expressed concerns about the potential disruption to businesses and traffic flow during the planned white-topping of M.G. Road. "Business activity in the area is already subdued, and the white-topping project will further exacerbate the situation," he said. "The road closure will eliminate parking spaces along the stretch, deterring potential customers from visiting this commercial hub."

While work on M.G. Road has yet to commence, residents in Devarabeesanahalli, where the crucial Sakra Hospital Road is undergoing white-topping, have demanded public consultations before proceeding with the project. They acknowledged the road's poor condition but emphasised the need for a comprehensive assessment to determine the most effective and appropriate solution. They also raised concerns about the impact of road closures on tech professionals who commute to IT companies via Outer Ring Road, fearing severe traffic congestion in the surrounding areas.

However, BBMP has begun work on the stretch.

Linked to tree-fall

Guruprasad, secretary of Heritage Basavanagudi, expressed concerns about the potential impact of white-topping on the area's trees. He noted that the completion of Gandhi Bazar Road and the commencement of work near Netkallappa Circle have raised alarms. "Past experiences with white-topping have demonstrated a correlation with tree-fall," explained Guruprasad. "For instance, a tree fell near M.N. Krishna Rao Park recently, damaging several vehicles. Subsequently, the BBMP's forest cell deemed two more trees vulnerable and ordered their removal. During the white-topping process, both sides of the road are excavated to shift utilities, often resulting in the removal of tree roots. This weakens the trees, making them susceptible to falling."

Prominent roads to be white-topped

- M.G. Road from Mahatma Gandhi Circle to Trinity Circle
- Cubbon Road from Minsk Square to Dickenson Road
- Palace Cross Road from railway underbridge approach road to BDA junction
- Main Guard Cross Road from Cubbon Road to Dispensary Road
- Swami Vivekananda Road from Trinity Circle to Adarsha Junction
- J.C. Road from Minerva Circle to Town Hall
- Sanjaynagar Main Road
- Bull Temple Road
- Arumugam Road
- Road connecting Arumugam junction to Netkallappa Circle
- K.H. Road from Mission Road to Lalbagh East Gate
- West of Chord Road from Vijayanagar TTMC to Vijayanagar market signal
- Sarjapur Road from Jakkasandra to Outer Ring Road
- CBI Road from Ballari Road to R.T. Nagar Main Road

Woman dies as car rams NWKRTC bus in Belagavi

The Hindu Bureau
BELAGAVI

sA 60-year-old woman died in a road accident near Umarani village on Nippani-Mudhol Road in Belagavi district on Sunday.

Nirmala Avate of Raibag was travelling in a car that rammed a NWKRTC bus. Her 43-year-old son and HESCOM engineer Neminath Avate, who was driving, escaped unhurt.

Timings
BENGALURU

MONDAY, DEC. 30		
RISE	06:41	SET 18:04
RISE	06:03	SET 17:31
TUESDAY, DEC. 31		
RISE	06:41	SET 18:04
RISE	07:00	SET 18:30
WEDNESDAY, JAN. 01		
RISE	06:42	SET 18:05
RISE	07:54	SET 19:30

Bengaluru Weather	max	min
Tumakuru	29	23
Mysuru	28	18
Bengaluru	27	18

Bengaluru Today
26°C TMostly dry weather to prevail.Morning will be cool with mist and haze. Day will be comfortable. Night will be slight cool.

Bengaluru Tomorrow
27°C Morning will be cool with mist and haze. The day will be comfortabe. Night will be cool. Dry weather to continue.

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THE HINDU
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1,414 more CNG stations to be established by 2030

CNG stations in Karnataka

Bengaluru Urban: 77	Gadag: 11	Davangere: 9
Bengaluru Rural: 41	Shivamogga: 11	Chickballapur: 4
Dakshina Kannada: 35	Kolar: 10	Chamarajanagar: 3
Ballari: 21	Chitradurga: 10	Kodagu: 2
Ramanagara: 17	Udupi: 10	Koppal: 7
Bidar: 16	Hassan: 12	Vijayapura: 8
Mysuru: 14	Dharwad: 9	Raichur: 6
Belagavi: 14	Tumakuru: 9	Kalaburagi: 11
Mandya: 11	Haveri: 9	Bagalkot: 13
		Yadgir: 1

(As of September 30, 2024)

Darshan Devaiah B.P.
BENGALURU

As part of the Minimum Work Programme (MWP), 412 Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) stations have been established in Karnataka. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas aims to set up an additional 1,414 CNG stations in the State by 2030.

Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas and Tourism Suresh Gopi stated that the establishment of CNG stations is part of the development of the City Gas Distribution (CGD) network, and the same is carried out by entities authorised by the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB). "PNGRB has authorised 18 Geographical Areas (GAs), including one GA spread across Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, and another GA spread across Telangana and Karnataka, covering the entire state of Karnataka. This is for the development of a City Gas Distribution (CGD) network with a Minimum Work Programme (MWP) target of 1,414 CNG stations to be established by 2030. As of September 30, 2024, entities have established 412 CNG stations in Karnataka," Mr. Gopi added.

Bengaluru leads

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) is the authorised body responsible for granting permissions to entities to lay, build, operate, or expand City Gas Distribution (CGD) or local natural gas distribution networks within Geographical Areas, as stipulated under the PNGRB Act, 2006.

According to the data, Bengaluru Urban leads the tally with 77 stations, followed by Bengaluru Rural with 41, both managed by GAIL Gas Limited. The coastal district of Dakshina Kannada ranks next with 35 stations. Districts such as Ballari (21), Ramanagara (17), and Bidar (16) have also seen significant development. While districts like Tumakuru and Dharwad each host nine stations, Udupi and Kolar districts have established 10 stations each. Kodagu, a tourist hotspot, has only two CNG stations.

Another cheating case against Shwetha Gowda

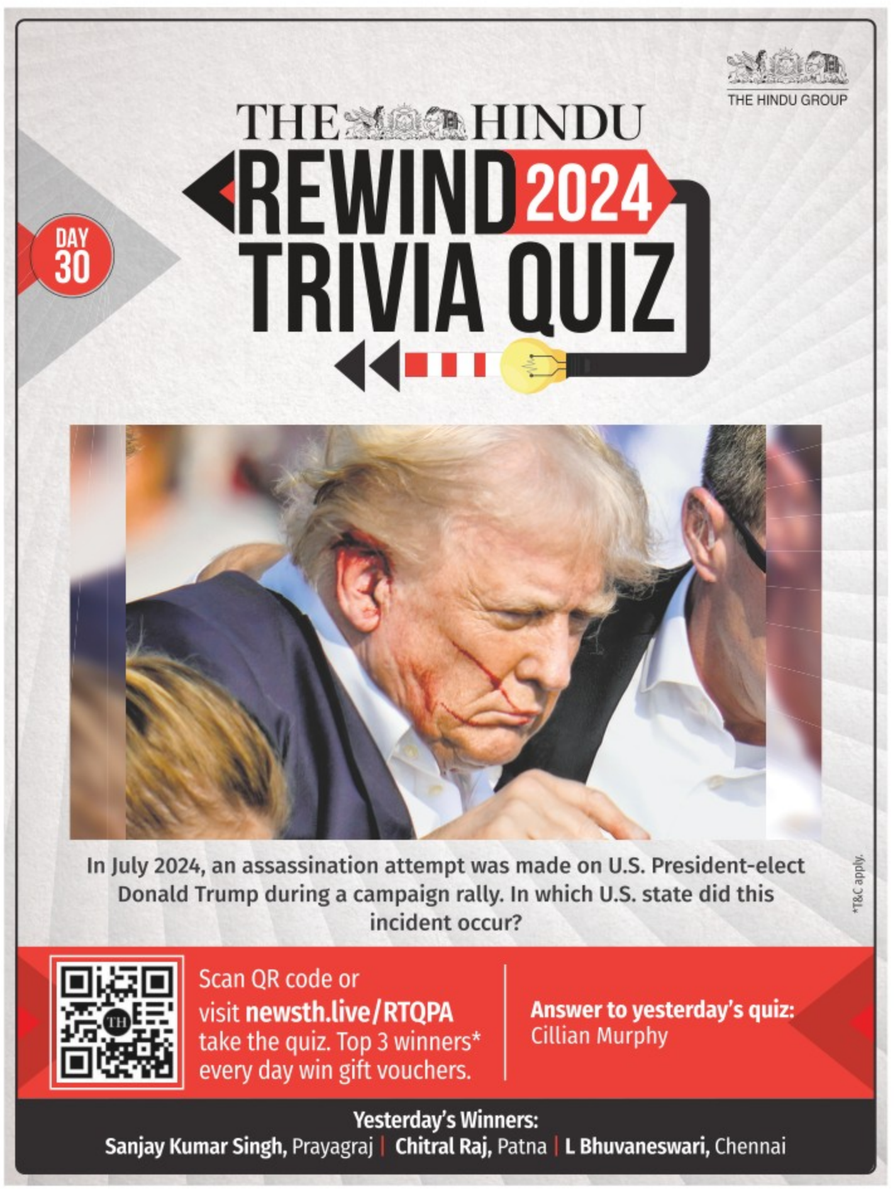
The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Shwetha Gowda, an alleged aide of former minister Varthur Prakash, arrested for cheating a jeweller, has been accused of cheating another jeweller.

The Commercial Street police registered a case against her on December 18 and arrested Shwetha for allegedly cheating a city-based jeweller of ₹2 crore.

In the same case, the police had questioned Prakash, who denied links with Shwetha. In the fresh case, filed following a complaint by R. Balaraj Shet, who owns Pragathi Jewellery in Shivamogga, it is alleged that Shwetha gave two invalid cheques and cheated the jeweller after obtaining 285 grams of antique jewellery worth an estimated ₹20.75 lakh.

Mr. Shet told the police that Shwetha, who he met through another jeweller, had claimed that she deals with antique jewellery and diamond ornaments. She then asked the jeweller to produce 250 grams of antique jewellery and then there was no contact between the duo, as per the FIR.


THE HINDU
THE HINDU GROUP
DAY 30
REWIND 2024
TRIVIA QUIZ
In July 2024, an assassination attempt was made on U.S. President-elect Donald Trump during a campaign rally. In which U.S. state did this incident occur?
Scan QR code or visit newsth.live/RTQPA take the quiz. Top 3 winners* every day win gift vouchers.
Answer to yesterday's quiz: Cillian Murphy
Yesterday's Winners:
Sanjay Kumar Singh, Prayagraj | Chitral Raj, Patna | L Bhuvaneswari, Chennai

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Contractor's death: BJP sticks to demand for a probe by CBI, Priyank's resignation

It is not suicide but a State-sponsored murder, Vijayendra says on Sachin Panchal's death and seeks ₹1 crore compensation to the family

The Hindu Bureau
KALABURAGI

Escalating its attack over a contractor ending his life by accusing the close aide of RDPR Minister Priyank Kharge of harassing him, the Opposition BJP's fact-finding team, led by State president B.Y. Vijayendra, not only visited the family of the deceased but also stuck to its demand for a CBI probe and resignation of the Minister.

Holding Mr. Priyank Kharge responsible for the suicide of Bidar-based contractor Sachin Panchal, Mr. Vijayendra termed his death as not suicide but a systematically executed State-sponsored murder. He also demanded an ex gratia payment of ₹1 crore and a government job to the family of Sachin.

'A prerequisite'

"Resignation of Priyank Kharge is a prerequisite for a fair investigation in the case. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah should sack Mr. Priyank Kharge from the ministry to ensure a free and fair investigation. The case should be handed over to the CBI. We don't accept an investigation by any agency other than the CBI. The State investigating agencies, at the behest of Mr. Priyank Kharge, are likely to threaten the family of the deceased," Mr. Vijayendra said after meeting Sachin's family members at Katti Tugaon village in Bhalki taluk of Bidar district on Sunday.

His visit came a few hours after Minister Eshwar Khandre met the family and announced an ex gratia payment of ₹10 lakh to the kin of Sachin and an impartial and transparent investigation into the case to bring the culprits to justice.

Just as Mr. Vijayendra and his team entered the house, the grief-stricken family members turned inconsolable. The team paid a floral tribute to Sachin and tried to console the family. When Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, who accompanied Mr. Vijayendra, offered cash relief to the family in a sealed cover, Sachin's sisters humbly refused to accept it by saying that they wanted justice, not money. They were persistent in their refusal even after Mr. Vijayendra repeatedly requested with folded hands to accept it.

"We don't want money. We want justice. We want the culprits responsible to my brother's death to be punished," they said.

Speaking to media representatives after the visit, Mr. Vijayendra referred to the alleged threat to Sachin's family members and demanded the that the government provide security to them. "Priyank Kharge is hell-bent on seeing that no other leader grows in Kalaburagi. He doesn't hesitate to get someone who dares to politically flourish murdered," he alleged.

BJP legislators N. Ravikumar, M.G. Mule, Shailendra Beldale, Siddalingappa Patil, Sharanu Salagar, Basavaraj Mattimadu, and Shashil Namoshi and party leaders Somanath Patil, Prakash Khandre, and others were present.

BJP State unit president B.Y. Vijayendra and Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy with family members of deceased contractor Sachin Panchal at Katti Tugaon village in Bhalki taluk of Bidar district on Sunday.

BJP forms two panels

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Close on the heels of its fact-finding committee's visit to the deceased contractor Sachin Panchal's house in Bidar district on Sunday, the BJP formed two committees – one for taking up a campaign against the government in connection with a series of suicides allegedly due to political reasons and another to look into the series of maternal deaths.

The 18-member campaign committee comprises Leader of the Opposition in the Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, MLA Araga Jnanendra and MLCs N. Ravikumar, K.S. Naveen, Bharati Shetty, and Hemalatha Nayak, among others.

Lahar Singh taunts Kharge Sr.

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

BJP's Rajya Sabha member Lahar Singh Siroya used the issue of a contractor committing suicide by accusing a close aide of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge of harassing him to taunt the Minister's father and AICC president M. Mallikarjun Kharge.

In a social media post, Mr. Siroya said: "While respected Mallikarjun Kharge Ji is busy saving democracy in Delhi, this is what is happening in his backyard, the Republic of Kalaburagi. His son, who acts like a great constitutional expert, is getting into one trouble after another." He further said: "This is not the only thing that is happening, the details of Kharge Ji's family trusts and land scams are also tumbling out one after the other. His family trust was recently forced to return 5 acres of KIADB land in Bengaluru, taken under the Dalit quota. Thanks to Sonia Gandhi's RTI legislation, the documents are rich in details."

He said: "Thanks also to the leadership tussle in @INCKarnataka, the flow of information is good. Nobody is loyal to anybody in the State Congress but only to themselves and their chair."

He taunted by remarking: "If Kharge Ji thinks Delhi is far away and nothing will reach there, he is wrong. I hope saving democracy doesn't become about saving himself and his family. That has anyway been the Nehru-Gandhi family mantra."

Meanwhile, in a release in Bengaluru, Leader of the Opposition R. Ashok urged Mr. Priyank Kharge to uphold morality by stepping down as Minister.

He alleged that the accused in the case had a criminal background as he had earlier been arrested on the charge of possessing an illegal gun.

Mr. Ashok said, "Mr. Priyank Kharge is not the Nizam of Kalaburagi (his home district)."

> Chief Minister Siddaramaiah should sack Priyank Kharge from the Ministry to ensure a free and fair investigation. The case should be handed over to the CBI.
>
> **B.Y. VIJAYENDRA,** BJP State president

Khandre announces relief of ₹10 lakh

Minister Eshwar Khandre meeting the family members of the deceased contractor Sachin Panchal at Katti Tugaon village in Bidar district on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Hindu Bureau
KALABURAGI

Amid a heated exchange of words between the ruling Congress and the Opposition BJP over the suicide of Bidar-based contractor Sachin Panchal, Minister for Forests and district in charge Eshwar Khandre visited the family of the deceased at Katti Tugaon village in Bhalki taluk of Bidar district on Sunday and announced an ex gratia payment of ₹10 lakh for the family.

"We are committed to helping the family in distress... As a gesture of consolation, I would like to announce that we will give the family an ex gratia payment of ₹10 lakh. Investigation [into the case] will continue," he said after meeting the family.

Terming the suicide as a sorrowful and painful incident in which a young breadwinner of the family has lost his life, Mr. Khandre said his government would stand with the grieving family, sharing their pain and grief.

"I held a detailed discussion with Sachin Panchal's family. When the family members sensed that Sachin was planning to end his life, they immediately lodged a missing complaint with the police but the police did not accept it. It is a serious issue. I have directed the Superintendent of Police to investigate the matter and act. I am told that action has been taken against some police personnel and an investigation is under way. Stringent action will be taken against all police personnel who were negligent in registering the complaint," Mr. Khandre said.

On the progress of the investigation and the names mentioned in the death note of the contractor, Mr. Khandre said the railway police were investigating the case after registering the first information report. "I have discussed the issue with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah as well. In his death note, Sachin had mentioned some names accusing them of harassing and abetting him to commit suicide. Our government will get the case impartially investigated by the CID [Criminal Investigation Department] or any other agency and take legal action against the accused," Mr. Khandre said.

Row over dress code in temple: Ban orders in Kodagu village

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

The district administration in Kodagu has imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita in S. Kattemadu village till January 2 following tension between two communities on dress code over temple entry.

The ban orders will be in place in a radius of 5 km from the Maha Mruthyunjaya Temple at S. Kattemadu in Madikeri taluk.

The genesis of the tension can be traced to the temple authorities preventing a section of the locals clad in traditional Kodava attire from entering the temple on December 28, citing temple bylaws that devotees should be clad in dhotis. This led to altercation between the devotees clad in Kodava attire and the temple administration.

The police order prohibits taking out of any procession, rally, jatha or raising incendiary or provocative slogans.

The incident drew flak from various sections of the Kodava community, some of whom threatened to organise a 'Kattemadu Chalo' on the grounds that this was an affront on the cultural practices of the local community.

Maletira Srinivas, secretary of Virajpet Kodava Samaj, held a press conference on Saturday to decry the incident and announce the march.

Meanwhile, security has been tightened in and around the temple.

CM to meet RTC unions on Jan. 15; strike plan dropped

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Ramalinga Reddy

KSRTC Employees Joint Action Committee had announced an indefinite strike from tomorrow

After being promised a meeting with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on January 15 to discuss all their demands threadbare, the KSRTC Employees Joint Action Committee, which had announced an indefinite strike from December 31, withdrew the strike call on Sunday night.

This comes following a meeting between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy in the evening.

H.V. Anantha Subba Rao, president of the KSRTC Staff and Workers Federation and a prominent leader of the committee, said they had called off the strike plan after Mr. Reddy promised them a meeting with the Chief Minister on January 15.

"We were approached by Mr. Reddy on Sunday night, and he said that all the issues would be discussed with the Chief Minister on January 15 and requested us to drop the strike plan. Hence, we have called it off," Mr. Rao added.

The charter of demands of the committee includes release of arrears and a pay revision, alongside other demands. They estimate that dues across the four RTCs amount to ₹8,010 crore.

Following the meeting with the Chief Minister, Mr. Reddy had appealed to the unions to call off the strike plan, making a case that their government had introduced several employee welfare measures such as enhancing infrastructure, accident insurance, health scheme, and recruiting 9,000 employees. He promised a patient hearing and all issues to be discussed threadbare with the Chief Minister in the January 15 meeting.

Toll in Hubballi fire accident rises to six

The Hindu Bureau
BELAGAVI

Two more Swami Ayyappa devotees among the nine who suffered burns in the fire accident at a temple in Hubballi died on Sunday.

Shankar Chavan, 29, and Manjunath Waghmode, 22, died on Sunday. With this, the toll in the incident has risen to six.

Those devotees undergoing treatment are Vinayak Baraker, Prakash Baraker, and Tejaswar Satare.

The fire broke out after LPG leaked in a temporary kitchen at the Swami Ayyappa tent of Achchavva Colony, Sai Nagar, here, on December 22.

Doctors at the KMC-RI Hospital said that the condition of two devotees is still critical.

CORRIDORS OF POWER

A conspicuous absence

Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge's absence at a function to inaugurate the 371-bed facility of Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research in Kalaburagi last week raised eyebrows.

Despite being the in-charge Minister of the district and camping in Kalaburagi alongside Medical Education Minister Sharan Prakash Patil to plan the event, he was conspicuously absent at the grand function.

Some claimed he left for Bengaluru late on the previous night because of a prior commitment, while others said that the long-standing rivalry between Mr. Kharge and Kalyana Karnataka Region Development Board Chairman Ajay Singh had intensified in recent days, reaching a triggering point the previous night over the issues of the inaugural event.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah made it a point to clarify in his speech that he had "personally instructed" Mr. Kharge to attend the convocation of a private university. "There is no other reason for his absence," he stressed.

Peculiar prayer in *hundi*

It is common for devotees visiting temples to pray to their favourite deities for health, wealth, and success in academics or business. These prayers are often accompanied by an offering of a puja and monetary contributions deposited in the *hundi* (collection box).

However, a rather unusual request was discovered at the temple of Bhagyawanti Devi at Ghattarga in Kalaburagi district, a revered goddess in the region. When the temple authorities recently opened the *hundi*, they found a ₹20 note with the plea, 'Let my mother-in-law die soon'. Last year at the temple of Lord Dattatreya at Ganagapur, another popular deity in the district, a ₹50 note was found in the *hundi* with the same prayer.

The latest note, visuals of which have been circulating widely on social media, not only reinforces a stereotypical view about mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, but also the eccentric side of devotional practices.

Reversal of roles

On one of the days in the recently concluded Winter Session of the State legislature in Belagavi, there was a reversal of roles in the Assembly. While Speaker U.T. Khader (*in picture*) has initiated a system of distributing prizes to members who come to the House early and has often pulled up those who come late, it was the turn of members that day to ask him why he was late.

Though the session was supposed to start at 9 a.m. on that Wednesday, and the quorum bell was ringing for a long time, the House met only around 9.45 a.m. with the entry of the Speaker.

As soon as the House began proceedings, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda took on the Speaker in a lighter vein: "What is this sir? We had to wait for you today!" The Speaker sheepishly said, "I cannot come alone, you see. I need to bring all the members too. Hence I was delayed." He meant that the blame was not really on him, but he was waiting for the quorum.

Kumar Buradikatti
B.S. Satish Kumar

RBI imposes penalty of ₹5.5 lakh on four coop. banks in State

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has imposed a penalty of ₹5.5 lakh on four cooperative banks in Karnataka for not complying with its directions. The highest penalty of ₹3 lakh has been imposed on Bengaluru-based Bharat Cooperative Bank.

Other banks penalised by the RBI are Sri Basaveshwara Pattana Sahakara Bank Niyamit, Sindagi; Swami Vivekanand Sahakari Bank Niyamit, Nidagundi; and Manjra Mahila Urban Cooperative Bank Limited, Bidar.

Non-compliance

The RBI in its release on December 26 said it imposed a penalty of ₹3 lakh on Bharat Cooperative Bank for non-compliance with specific directions issued by it under the Supervisory Action Framework (SAF). "The bank had sanctioned fresh loans and advances, in non-adherence to directions under the SAF, which were beyond the applicable single borrower exposure limit and not backed by collateral security of term deposits/NSCs/KVPs/insurance policies," the release said.

The RBI imposed a penalty of ₹1 lakh on Swami Vivekanand Sahakari Bank Niyamit for non-compliance with certain directions issued by it on 'Exposure Norms and Statutory/Other Restrictions - UCBs' and Know Your Customer' (KYC).

The RBI imposed a penalty of ₹1 lakh on Sri Basaveshwara Pattana Sahakara Bank Niyamit for non-compliance with specific directions issued by it under the SAF. It imposed a monetary penalty of ₹50,000 on Manjra Mahila Urban Cooperative Bank for non-compliance with certain directions issued by it on KYC.

The Central bank said its action against these four cooperative banks is based on deficiencies in regulatory compliance and that it is not intended to pronounce the validity of any transaction or agreement entered into by the banks with their customers. "Further, imposition of this monetary penalty is without prejudice to any other action that may be initiated by the RBI against the bank," the release said.

Man held

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

The Udayagiri police have arrested a man who allegedly duped many people in the name of investment schemes. This came after people gathered outside the police station on Friday alleging that the scamsters had gone absconding.

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From the farmlands: Why agri-tech might need a different approach to boost innovations

IIIT-B, a premier research deemed university in Bengaluru, has been developing a host of projects with the idea of introducing higher efficiency in agricultural processes

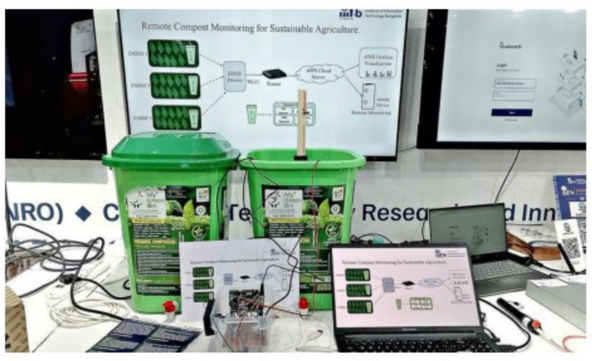
Shilpa Elizabeth
BENGALURU

Innovations in the agriculture space estimated to be around $24 billion, have barely scratched the surface given the myriad challenges such as low market adoption, high customer acquisition cost, lukewarm investor interest, high infrastructure costs, and more. FILE PHOTO

Primarily an agrarian economy, India holds large potential for research and technological innovation in agriculture. Nevertheless, innovations in this space which is estimated to be around $24 billion, have barely scratched the surface given the myriad challenges such as low market adoption, high customer acquisition costs, lukewarm investor interest, high infrastructure costs, and more.

Compared to tech in other sectors, Indian Agri-Tech might need a different approach to turbocharge innovations in this space, say experts. IIIT-B, for example, takes an interdisciplinary approach and often looks at developing solutions as digital public goods.

The institution has been developing a host of Agri-Tech projects with the idea of introducing higher efficiency in agricultural processes. These include AutoGrow - an Autonomous greenhouse System for Precision Agriculture, Smart Greenhouse with secure long-range connectivity, a Remote Compost Monitoring system for Sustainable agriculture and AgriSense (an IoT system for with a soil monitoring device) among others.



Remote Compost Monitoring for sustainable agriculture. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

An India-specific problem

"Autogrow, which is the autonomous greenhouse system for precision agriculture, is an autonomous system for growing food. We are trying to solve a very India-specific problem," says Ramesh Kestur, faculty at IIIT-B.

The system seamlessly integrates biological food production with an IoT/AI-based system and includes automated greenhouse control of climatic conditions, irrigation, and nutrient supply to plants. This can provide substantial gains in increasing the efficiency of crop production while using optimal resources and thereby reducing costs.

"If you see in the West, they lack resources such as lighting and therefore cannot grow throughout the year. So, we should not imitate their solution. We have enough light, and we can grow 365 days a year. We just need to control whatever is critical for our condition," Kestur explains. Given the abundance of sunlight and temperature in the country, his team avoided including components like LED lights in the system which helped to reduce cost and complexity. After eliminating the unnecessary, the team then looked what needed to be controlled.

One was the inputs which were essentially water and nutrients. "We thought we will try to build a system and control those things. With this motivation, we built systems for three configurations; One is the hydroponic system. The other one is what we call the vertical system where we can vertically stack growbags. And the last is the open field."

"It's a non-linear control system where the inputs are continuously monitored, and the required amount of nutrition is administered. It is a control system realized with sensors and AI-ML algorithms," notes Kestur, adding that no sensors are placed in the soil as it can lead to quick draining of battery. Instead, the temperature and moisture sensors are placed in the input tank where levels of nutrition such as nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium are monitored.

The project is done in collaboration with the Department of Biotechnology, IIHR, Bengaluru. The wick irrigation technology developed at IIHR has been incorporated into the system.

Greenhouse monitoring

AgriSense and Smart Greenhouse Monitoring System are led by professor Jyotsna Bapat at IIIT-B. Both are sponsored by the Government of Karnataka.

The Smart Greenhouse Monitoring System aims to transform greenhouse farming by leveraging IoT to improve crop health, automate environmental controls, and facilitate remote monitoring. The idea is to enable farmers to monitor environmental conditions like temperature, humidity, soil moisture, and pH remotely, providing real-time data for precise control over crop conditions.

The system looks at features such as real-time data monitoring utilising a network of sensors, automated control based on sensor data, remote accessibility for farmers via app and data analysis and alerts with the help of machine learning.

Optimising inputs

In agriculture finding the optimum watering level to ensure maximum output has always been a problem. Yet another challenge is the deteriorating health of soil due to over application of fertilisers. AgriSense, an IoT system developed by the institute to address these challenges, uses Agri-cone a mushroom shaped soil-monitoring device.

"We were initially looking at the bigger farms where we could help the farmers to ensure irrigation is done in the correct way. By measuring the soil moisture content and looking at the predicted forecast, we could advise them on the irrigation that should be done," explains Bapat.

"Another aspect is the soil content and we measure carbondioxide and ammonia in it. If the soil is of good quality, then the amount of carbon dioxide will be relatively higher. If there is too much of urea or any of the other fertilizers, the amount of ammonia released would be higher. So, we can advise them based on these too."

Inside Agri-cone, a coin battery powers various sensors for monitoring soil moisture and temperature. The sensors detect gases such as including CO_2 and ammonia. Humidity sensors track air moisture levels around plants, helping to prevent diseases and promote healthy growth.

"Right now, we have put a small battery. But the goal is to put solar surface on top of the mushroom so that it becomes completely sustainable," Bapat notes.

"Right now, we just use Wi-Fi. But the other solution is something called LoRA. It is used for IoT a lot in Europe and in Netherlands, their entire IoT network is on LoRA. It is more power efficient, and the range is higher which makes it suitable for a vast field," says Bapat.

Compost monitoring

The team led by Bapat has also been working on a Remote Compost Monitoring system. The idea was to build a prototype for an intelligent IoT system that remotely monitors and manages compost which can then be used as fertilizer.

Bapat explains that the system developed by them can help compost Bengaluru's garbage piles, with a lot of food waste in it, correctly while avoiding odour.

The solution developed by the team comes with a sensor hub associated with each bin to monitor pH values, temperature, humidity, and CO2 levels of the compost inside them. It also allows remote monitoring of these values and generation of alerts using a mobile phone.

Bapat notes that the solution also helps to avoid manual labour which involves a person checking and stirring the compost.

Market reception

While several such initiatives are being designed, for agri-tech solutions market adoption is always a challenge. Bapat feels that for solutions like AgriSense urban folks with vegetable gardens in the backyard could be the initial customers. "Although it is mainly designed for the farmers, if we can see some urban folks as early adopters, that will be useful," she notes.

With regards to Auto-Grow, Kestur notes that the proof of concept has been done and patent filed. The next step would be to match it to a start-up through the institute's innovation cell to scale up the solution.

According to him AI has the potential to introduce hyper efficiency in agriculture and it's important to build India-specific solutions with it. "It's an opportunity for us being an agrarian economy. A whole lot of things are opening up to us. There's so much to do in agriculture in terms of making farmers hyper efficient."

Funding issues

While he admits that lack of funding in agritech poses a challenge to scaling up and deployment, Kestur notes that his team is trying to address problem differently.

"Reaching out to farmers is going to be difficult because the end users are too fragmented. So, we are working with Farmer Producer Organisations (FPO). We have conducted a few workshops where we have spoken to farmers to get problem statements from them. We are looking at start-ups in this space and trying to do the facilitation job. We are trying to map those start-ups to the problems presented by FPOs," he says. Kestur also notes that agri-tech needs to be approached differently compared to consumer tech or other sectors which attract large funding.

Public digital infra

"Agriculture is a use case where solutions should be developed as public digital infrastructure. Take the case of aadhaar. It has been successful. If it was developed by a large company, they would have been able to make billions of dollars. But it is open source for public good. We should have equivalents of that in agriculture," he notes.

Kestur also stresses the need for interdisciplinary research. "Now we have agricultural universities. Then there are technology universities like us. So, there's a need to do interdisciplinary research. Auto Grow is a small step in the direction. They(IIHR) bring in the domain expertise and we bring in technology."

Bangalore Cake Show: Celebration of creativity, craftsmanship

The event organised by the Institute of Baking and Cake Art and MyBakersMart is showcasing works of bakers from across India

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The 50th Annual Bangalore Cake Show is back in Bengaluru to showcase the artistic prowess of bakers across India. Started by C. Ramachandra, the event is a celebration of creativity and craftsmanship, featuring elaborate edible masterpieces that redefine cake design.

Organised by the Institute of Baking and Cake Art (IBCA) and MyBakersMart, the event is the culmination of months of preparation, showcasing the boundless possibilities of sugar and fondant as art mediums.

This Year's Theme, 'A Celebration of Art,' showcases 20 meticulously crafted cakes from varying themes. Manish Gaur, one of the event's organisers, said, "The theme is called 'Art', and art can be interpreted in many ways, from nature, jewellery, music, to fashion."

"With this event we try to cater to all age groups and show how fun can also be related to a cake," he further added.

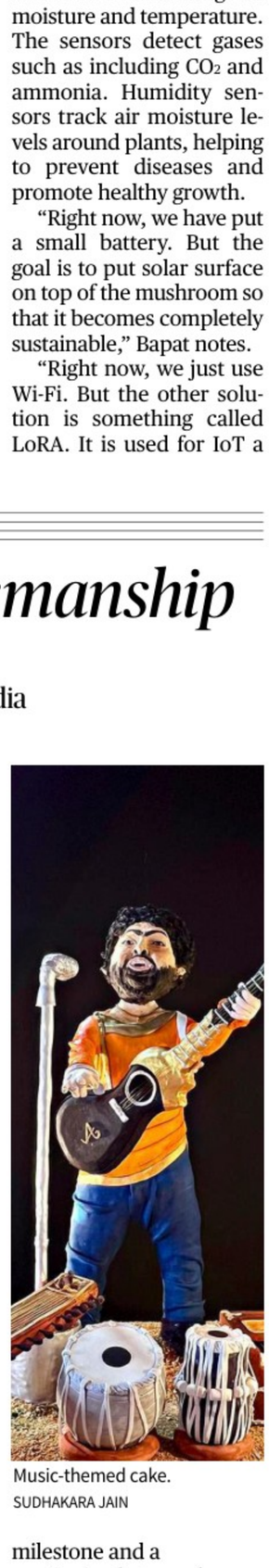
Enchanted Christmas Tree. SUDHAKARA JAIN

Some of the highlights from the event include 'The Enchanted Christmas Tree,' a 20-foot-tall marvel adorned with edible ornaments, marshmallows, and a working toy train around its base, and 'Ram Mandir: A Sacred Tribute,' an 850-kilo masterpiece replicating the intricate temple architecture with sugar craft and elements like lions, elephants, and Hanuman.

Krishna-themed cake. SUDHAKARA JAIN

From a sugar-built 'Glass House Garden' to the 'Kempegowda Legacy' celebrating Bangalore's founder, each exhibit reflects hours of intricate craftsmanship by teams of talented artists, including celebrated names like Santanu, Mahesh, Purva, and Narmatha.

The 50th Annual Cake Show is a spectacular milestone and a continuing legacy of innovation and inspiration.



Music-themed cake. SUDHAKARA JAIN

The event is ongoing from December 13, 2024, to January 1, 2025, at Palace Grounds from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

FROM THE ARCHIVES
The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 30, 1974

More Wheat Supply to Mangalore Cardholders

Mangalore, Dec. 29: The Karnataka Food Minister, Mrs. Eva Vaz, told pressmen here yesterday the Government would release the monthly quota of food grains for distribution to cardholders in Mangalore before the tenth of every month. The Government would also set right anomalies in the distribution system, which she admitted were to an extent responsible for the price rise. Though the government was unable to meet the demand for more rice the people would get a larger quota of wheat supply.

She announced that cardholders in Mangalore would get as a new year gift, double the quota of wheat, each person getting two kilos. The additional quota would be the higher priced Punjab wheat. Consumers could get any amount of milo.

Traffic Accidents

Bangalore, Dec. 29: There was a record number of traffic accidents in Bangalore and its outskirts on December 27 and 28. Three persons died and 16 were injured in the four accidents.

Fourteen passengers travelling by a Road Transport corporation bus going from here to Mysore sustained minor injuries when it capsized while negotiating a curve on December 27 and 28. The accident took place on the Mysore Road near the R.V. Engineering college. The injured were treated at the Victoria Hospital as outpatients.

CITYBEATS

Discover this

ONGOING
Naturals Ice Cream launched its classic Original Guava Ice Cream. The product, said to be a seasonal flavour, is made from Allahabad pink guavas, milk and sugar. It is for those who appreciate the natural, fruity taste of guava. Launched on December 20, this variant is available for 45 days. *Available across ll Naturals outlets, Zomato and Swiggy.*

Being resolute

DECEMBER 31
SOCIAL will host the Anti-Resolution Party - The NYE Bash at 7pm. It is all about leaving your resolutions at the door, re-imagining the celebration, which promises to be bold and unforgettable. You can also avail 1+1 on the drink's menu till January 1. *Across all SOCIAL outlets. Tickets exclusively available on District by Zomato.*

An eclectic platter

ONGOING
This winter menu is described as a celebration of authentic Hong Kong flavours and offers you a range of curated teas. From classic Canton tea to the earthy richness of matcha tea or jasmine tea, you will have a wide array to choose from.
The food includes dimsums, dumplings, and tea soju sangrias and more. *At Cha Hong Kong Eating House, Phoenix Mall of Asia.*

A celebration of biodiversity and heritage

With farm-to-table feasts, Badaga traditional dance, and climate activism, the Nilgiris Earth Festival 2024 united community, culture, and conservation

Praveen Sudevan

Celebrating the blue hills
Snapshots from the Nilgiris Earth Festival 2024
SPECIAL ARR ANGEMENT

When it comes to conservation messaging, two distinct approaches often emerge.

The first is a celebration – showcasing the planet's wonders, like the comforting bird songs at dawn or the life-giving shade of an ancient forest. It gently reminds us of what stands to be lost.

The second approach, stark and urgent, holds up a mirror to humanity's ecological footprint. It confronts us with polluted rivers, vanishing species, and the smog-filled skies of our own making.

The Nilgiris Earth Festival takes the first approach. It's a celebration of the wildlife, food, culture, and community that the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve offers, balanced with the understanding that it comes with a responsibility to protect it.

Spanning over 5,000 square kilometres across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala, the biosphere reserve is home to a network of five national parks and four wildlife sanctuaries teeming with diverse flora and fauna.

Organised by The Nilgiris Foundation, an offshoot of Keystone Foundation with three decades of experience in sustainable living, the festival has grown into a space where ecology meets culture.

Now in its third year, this four-day celebration (from December 19 to 22) is as much about the Nilgiris' food and heritage as it is about sustainability and climate action conversations.

Fresh from the farm

On the third afternoon of the Nilgiris Earth Festival, we arrive at Kikui Farms in Ooty to experience the flavours of high-elevation organic produce and farm-to-table cooking with organic farmer and chef Vishanth Kumar. He greets us with a fermented Rhubarb Soda kombucha – salmon pink, fizzy, and frothing as it's poured. Misty mountains frame the scene, mingling with smoke from barbecue grills manned by Vishanth's chef friends.

The spread is unforgettable: sourdough pizza made with 90% whole grain wheat, live tacos, and a Badaga buffet with kale greens *poriyal*, *gaasu gose* (cabbage mashed with potatoes and peas), red rice, *thupadhittu* (lentil fritters), and berry tarts – all made with produce from Vishanth's farm.

A Badaga farmer by heritage, Vishanth's family has owned a 150-year-old tea estate since the 1930s. After working as a chef in the UK, he returned to India to promote organic farming but struggled to change local mindsets. He began growing vegetables commercially, creating veggie boxes, and processing surplus into jams and hot sauces. Today, he has a steadily increasing supply network in Bengaluru.

"The organic movement isn't just non-chemical farming," he explains. "It's about creating living ecosystems, buzzing with insects, critters, and life forms."

Vishanth is one of many change-makers celebrated by the Nilgiris Earth Festival. By highlighting stories like his, the festival shines a light on individuals redefining sustainable living.

Final-day celebrations

The final day of the Nilgiris Earth Festival feels like a culmination, a celebration of ideas, community, and the land itself. Talks by Bablu Ganguly of Timbaktu Collective, Arshiya Bose of the Bengaluru-based Black Baza Coffee, and G Sundarrajan of Poovulagin Nanbargal touch on topics close to the heart of this region: climate activism, food sovereignty, and biodiversity.

Bablu reflects on his 45 years working in rural Andhra Pradesh. "The margins create the whole. Without the margins, there's no centre," he says. Arshiya speaks about her work in the coffee landscapes of the Western Ghats, where she partners with smallholder farmers to promote biodiversity-friendly practices. Meanwhile, Sundarrajan shares his experiences of grass-roots activism, including his fight against ecologically harmful projects.

A screening of *Nilgiris: A Shared Wilderness*, directed by Sandesh Kadur,captures how animals like gaur and leopards, and even people, navigate the fragile balance between nature and human encroachment.

Stalls dot the venue, offering a glimpse into the region's essence. There's wild fig honey from Keystone's Aadhimalai, handwoven Toda shawls, and organic spices and vegetables from local farmers. Lunch features a Badaga thali, a feast of red rice, fish curry, Kuthiravali rice *venpongal*, *varaghu* biriyani, *keerai vadai*, and *kambu* laddoos, served amid blooming yellow flowers.

Later, a traditional Badaga dance invites people into a circle that keeps growing, a living metaphor for inclusion and community.

Pratim Roy, co-founder of the Keystone Foundation and director of the festival, reflects on its evolution. "The Nilgiris Earth Festival started as a Wild Food Festival, and now it connects people to the landscape and its challenges," he says.

As we drive back to Coimbatore, our cab driver shares stories of the wilderness.

He recounts how wild animals – bison, elephants, and even a tiger – have occasionally blocked his car. Intrigued, we ask, "Don't they attack?" He smiles and responds with quiet wisdom, "They never do anything. It's us who have encroached on their space. As long as we respect that, they let us be. And we should let them be."

His words are a poignant reminder that coexistence is not just a concept but a necessity.

FILM REVIEW

A fiery high-octane action thriller

Vivek MV

Inspector Arjun Mahakshay a.k.a Max takes charge unofficially a day before his suspension ends. A huge blunder inside the station puts Max against powerful men, who come for his life. As he is faced with the improbable task of saving his colleagues and coming out unscathed from the problem, the daring cop pauses to prepare a cup of tea.

Director Vijay Kartikeyaa's debut project is driven by a protagonist who keeps you guessing about his next move. Even if *Max* aims to provide unhinged *masala* entertainment, the movie's leading man is not a one-note character. Since the events unfold during one night, and he has limited time to cross a series of hurdles, Max puts his sharp brain to quick use. And once he enters the risky zone of facing the criminals head-on, he unleashes the beast inside him.

Max is a celebration of Sudeep, who oozes style in his aggressive portrayal of an all-conquering officer. If you saw him as a subdued yet classy cop carrying a deep pain within him in *Vikrant Rona* (2022), Sudeep cuts loose in *Max* to cater to his fans, who were hungry for 'mass' moments involving their favourite star.

The one-man show is fun to watch to an extent. Vijay scripts an old-school world where the hero emerges as the ultimate saviour of distressed people. However, as a whole, *Max* leaves you wanting more as you expect the protagonist to face the heat of a mighty antagonist.

Sunil, essaying the antagonist, is undone by a toothless character. Varalaxmi Sarathkumar's character of a cop with a negative shade shows promise early on but fizzles out eventually as she fails to make any difference to the plot. Right from the beginning, it is apparent that both the characters are bracing for an inevitable onslaught from Max.

It is also shocking how Max has an almost incompetent team. When they are not blindly following instructions from Max, the junior-level officers are scared and clueless. Ilavarasu, playing an experienced officer, delivers a measured performance. The rest of the cast, including Uggram Manju, Samyuktha Hornad, Sukrutha Wagale and Vijay Chendur, are too loud in their respective portrayals.

One cannot blame the actors as their characters are designed to artificially amp up the tension.

The core idea of *Max* might remind you of Lokesh Kanagaraj's *Kaithi* (2019). With so much happening in a short span of time, it is tough to emotionally invest in the proceedings. On the other hand, *Max's* racy screenplay keeps you curious about the events on screen. A superb fusion of Chethan D Souza's action choreography and Ajaneesh Lokanath's ensures an adrenaline-pumping experience.

Max is a star vehicle with admirable experiments from the makers. With *Vikrant Rona* and *Max,* Sudeep has deviated from traditional commercial films.

The big stars of Kannada cinema are seeking change, and that is a good sign.

Max is currently running in theatres.

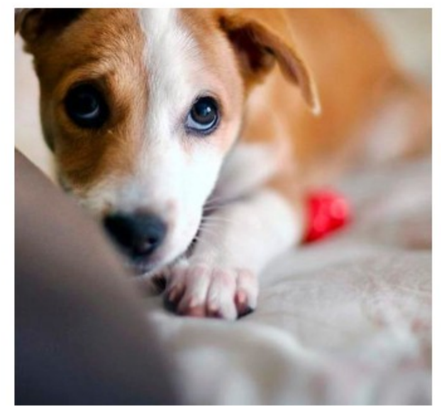
High on Adrenaline
Sudeep in stills from the film.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Max (Kannada)
Director: Vijay Kartikeyaa
Cast: Sudeep, Varalaxmi Sarathkumar, Ilavarasu, Uggram Manju
Runtime: 132 minutes
Storyline: A day before reporting for duty after a two-month suspension, inspector Arjun Mahakshay faces an unexpected situation. Can he save the day?

PET PALS

Momo

This 2.5-month-old male pup is white and brown and has a heartwarming story of resilience. Rescued from a slum during heavy rains, Momo is now perfectly healthy, well-mannered, and calm. He loves curd rice and sweet potato, and his diet includes nutritious vegetables like pumpkin, beetroot, and carrots. Potty-trained and responsive to commands like 'sit' and 'come,' Momo is ready to bring joy to your home.



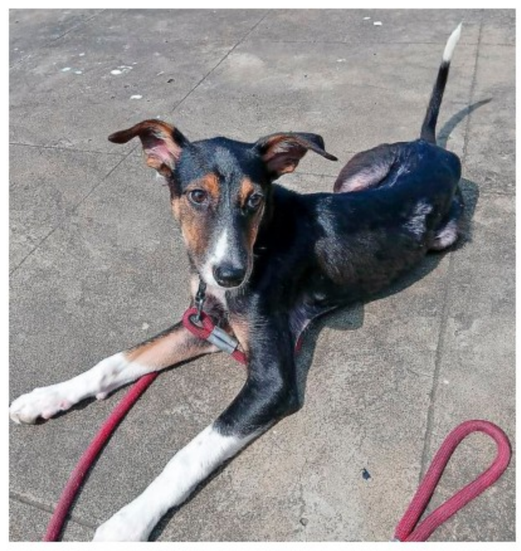
Appla

Meet Appla, a 2.5-month-old female pup with a white and brown coat and an incredible story of resilience. After losing her mother to a cheetah at Ramdevara Betta, she's now healthy, energetic, and playful. Social with people and dogs, Appla loves curd rice, boiled vegetables, and soft toys. She's potty trained to use pee pads and has a unique talent – she learned to climb stairs in just one day!

Uppinkai

Uppinkai, a 4.5-month-old female pup with striking black fur, brown patches, and adorable white socks, has overcome a tough start. Rescued from Kanakapura Highway, she was frightened, flea-ridden, and covered in scars. Now fully healed, she's a healthy, friendly, and cuddly companion. Uppinkai loves boiled vegetables, curd rice, and fruits (no citrus). Pee-pad trained and quick to learn, she already obeys commands like 'sit.'

For more information and adoption enquiries, contact Let's Live Together at 9986413916



INBRIEF

Sabarimala temple reopens for Makaravilakku festival

Marking the start of the second leg of the annual pilgrimage season, the Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala will reopen for the Makaravilakku festival on Monday. Melsanthi (head priest) S. Arun Kumar Namboothiri will open the sanctum at 4 p.m. in the presence of Tantri (chief priest) Kandararu Brahmadathan. Special arrangements for crowd control and safety have been implemented, with an increase in spot booking counters for easier access.

Modi should take a firm stand on steel plant, says CPI(M)

CPI(M) State secretary V. Srinivasa Rao has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to confirm the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's public sector status during his January 8 visit. Mr. Rao criticised Mr. Modi for previously avoiding the topic and accused him of secretly pushing for privatisation. He also expressed disappointment that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu did not address the VSP issue in his recent discussions with Mr. Modi in Delhi.

MLA in Kerala falls during event, put on life support

Thrikkakara MLA Uma Thomas sustained serious head injuries after falling from a height at the Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium, Kaloor in Kerala on Sunday evening.

She was rushed to a private hospital and placed on ventilator support due to critical condition.

The incident occurred while she attended a dance event aiming for a Guinness World Record, where she reportedly lost her balance and fell from a height of 15 feet on to concrete floor.

Thangal and Archbishop meet, take up Munambam land row

While Pamplany says the visit had no political purpose, Thangal says that a harmonious relation should be maintained between communities, but refused to comment on the land controversy

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

Panakkad Syed Sadikali Shihab Thangal, State president of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) in Kerala, met Mar Joseph Pamplany, Thalassery Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, at the bishop house at Thalassery in Kannur on Sunday.

According to sources, Mr. Thangal reached the bishop house around 9 a.m., where discussions took place for an hour. They also had breakfast together after cutting a Christmas cake. Current topics such as the stand-off over the Munambam land issue were taken up.

Friendly visit: Panakkad Syed Sadikali Shihab Thangal with Mar Joseph Pamplani in Thalassery on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Mr. Pamplany later said that the visit had no political purpose, adding that there should not be any divide between various communities. Meetings should be held between the community leaders to build camaraderie between them. Frank conversations need to be held and disagreements and opinions should be shared, he said.

Mr. Thangal, meanwhile, said that a harmonious relation should be maintained between communities. He declined to comment on the Munambam land issue as cases related to it were pending in the court.

Mr. Pamplany had earlier advocated for a fair solution to the Munambam land issue setting aside vote-bank politics, while accusing the State government of denying natural justice to the local residents there. He had also visited the site of the relay hunger strike taken out by the residents. He had also said that the LDF and the UDF accusing the BJP of communally exploiting the issue was akin to admitting their lapses.

False cases against me and my brother will not scare us, says BRS MLC Kavitha

The Hindu Bureau
NIZAMABAD

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MLC K. Kavitha has accused the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) governments of filing false cases against her and her brother K.T. Rama Rao as political vendetta.

"These ruling parties lack the courage to confront my father and BRS president, K. Chandrasekhar Rao," she said, adding that these tactics would not intimidate KCR's children and BRS leaders.

K. Kavitha

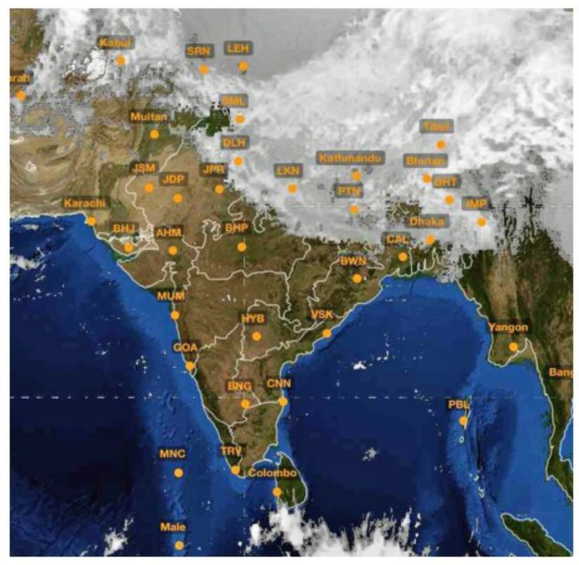
Speaking at a public meeting in Nizamabad on Sunday, Ms. Kavitha alleged that the Congress government in Telangana had been filing false cases against BRS leaders "even for critical posts on social media". She accused both the State and Central governments of misrule and failure to address people's real needs.

Ms. Kavitha also took a dig at Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, and said that he had failed to fulfil the promises made to farmers, women and minorities. She highlighted several 'unfulfilled' commitments of the Congress government, including increasing pensions and providing adequate support to minorities. She also criticised the government of depriving women of financial assistance.

Talking about KCR's leadership and the BRS under him, Ms. Kavitha said, "We are the ones who fought for and achieved statehood. We will stand strong and fight for the people."

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

Forecast for Monday: Dense fog to very dense fog very likely in isolated pockets of Punjab, Haryana; Dense fog in isolated pockets of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam & Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura in night/morning hours. Cold wave conditions very likely in a few pockets of Rajasthan.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	27.6	13.4	Kozhikode	—	34.4	24.6
Ahmedabad	—	25.4	15.0	Kurnool	—	33.2	20.1
Aizawl	—	24.9	10.8	Lucknow	—	19.8	13.4
Allahabad	2	24.4	14.5	Madurai	—	31.2	22.1
Bengaluru	—	27.4	19.2	Mangaluru	—	33.9	23.0
Bhopal	17	22.4	16.8	Mumbai	—	30.2	21.2
Bhubaneswar	—	30.9	16.9	Mysuru	—	—	—
Chandigarh	4	16.2	8.6	New Delhi	—	15.2	11.8
Chennai	0.1	29.3	24.5	Patna	—	25.7	16.1
Coimbatore	—	31.8	21.5	Port Blair	—	30.5	26.8
Dehradun	10	22.1	9.9	Puducherry	—	29.9	23.8
Gangtok	—	14.5	9.1	Pune	—	32.4	20.8
Goa	—	—	—	Raipur	—	28.9	18.7
Guwahati	—	26.9	11.4	Ranchi	—	28.9	18.7
Hubballi	—	30.0	18.0	Shillong	—	18.7	7.5
Hyderabad	—	30.4	19.2	Shimla	—	13.0	3.4
Imphal	—	25.6	8.3	Srinagar	2	4.2	-0.2
Jaipur	—	17.9	7.2	Thiruvananthapuram	—	33.5	24.7
Kochi	—	31.4	24.5	Tiruchi	0.3	30.7	22.0
Kohima	—	25.9	11.2	Vijayawada	—	30.7	20.4
Kolkata	—	28.2	15.6	Visakhapatnam	—	30.1	20.2

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	21	30	11	145	131	
Bengaluru	15	40	31	95	83	
Chennai	8	18	30	148	133	
Delhi	59	42	29	308	149	
Hyderabad	6	112	55	107	138	
Kolkata	12	47	27	235	171	
Lucknow	15	7	20	215	125	
Mumbai	14	76	26	293	161	
Pune	26	83	35	167	139	
Visakhapatnam	8	77	35	161	130	

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Byrnihat, Meghalaya recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 348 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 23.

Air Quality Code: Poor | Moderate | Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

THE HINDU

EDUCATIONPLUS

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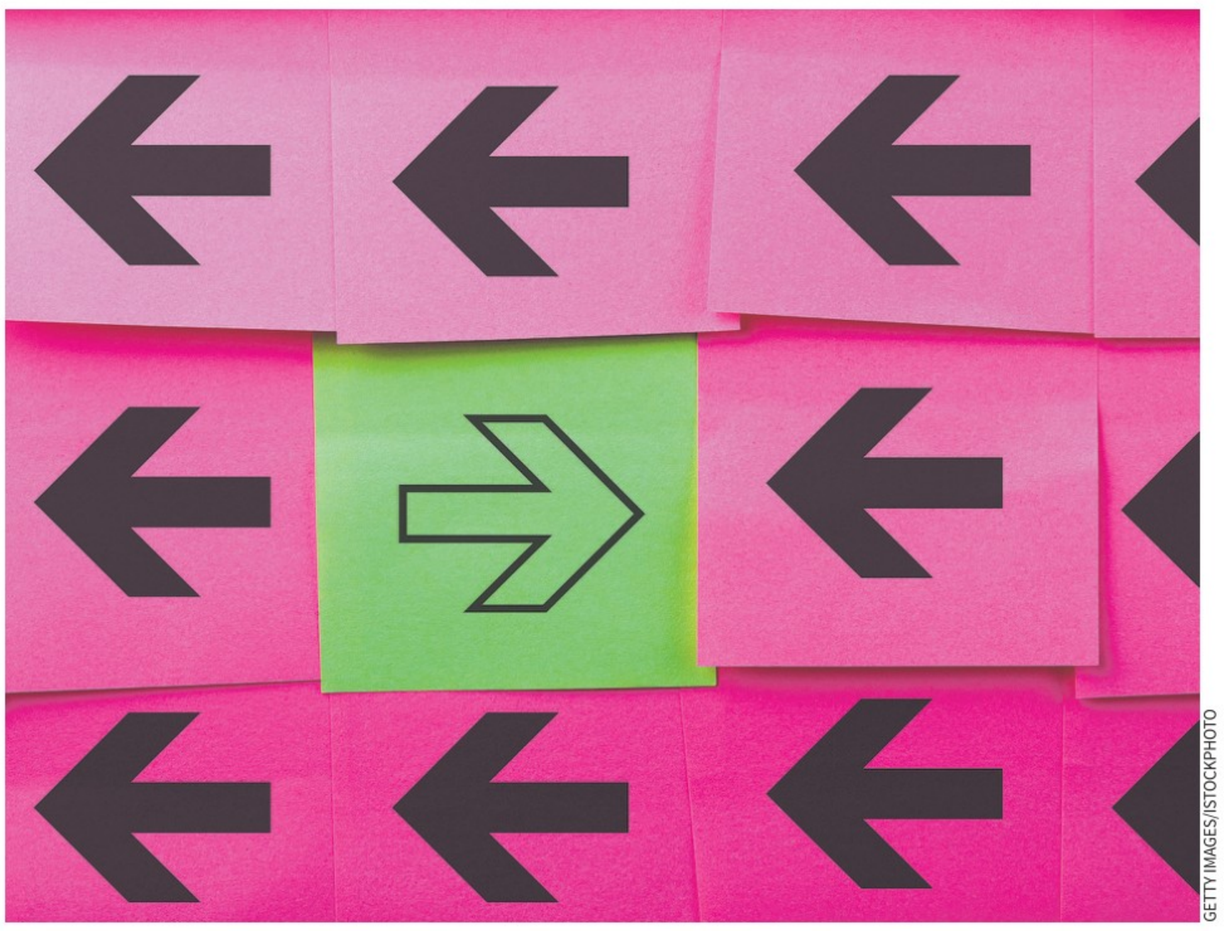
Towards a green future

By equipping young people with green skills, India can chart a course toward a more sustainable and equitable future

Balaji Vharkat
Priyanka Shendage



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

India, known for its rich and diverse ecosystems, is facing severe environmental challenges due to rapid urbanisation and development. Pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and the looming impacts of climate change are taking a toll on the balance of fragile natural ecosystems. While this year has presented a multitude of climate challenges, each with far-reaching consequences, 2023 was the warmest year on record, and 2025 is projected to be even hotter. India has observed a significant mean temperature increase of 0.15°C per decade since 1950, according to a 2020 assessment by the Ministry of Earth Sciences. This has dire implications for ecosystems, agriculture, and human health.

Build resilience

The brunt of these environmental challenges is felt by the youth, who have to deal with not only the immediate effects but also the long-term consequences. Thus, for India's younger generation, building resilience against these crises is vital, as they will inherit and shape the planet's future. In this context, green skills have emerged as an essential tool in mitigating and adapting to the rapidly changing climate. These skills encompass technical knowledge, practical competencies, and mindsets required to implement sustainable practices, environmentally friendly technologies, and resource-efficient solutions across various sectors.

Green skills empower individuals to make sustainable choices, address pressing environmental concerns and are especially crucial for youngsters, who will drive the global shift towards sustainability. In India, approximately 20% of the workforce is already employed in green jobs, a number expected to double by 2030. This growing demand for green-skilled workers presents a unique opportunity to harness the country's demographic dividend. The range of green skills needed spans (but is not limited to) renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, water resource management, climate change adaptation, and waste management.

For example, skilling in solar panel installation, wind turbine maintenance, or hydroelectric power plant operations can significantly contribute to India's renewable energy transition. Expertise in sustainable farming practices, such as organic agriculture and water conservation, can strengthen food security while protecting the environment. Similarly, skills in urban planning, pollution control, and waste management are critical to create sustainable cities and reduce the ecological footprint of urban areas.

Green skills are not only about adopting new technologies but also include efficient management of existing infrastructure, services, and systems. India's continued growth relies on sustainable operations across sectors, from energy to agriculture, to ensure that economic expansion does not come at the cost of the environment.

Pivotal role

The role of the youth in the green transition is paramount. Youngsters are already at the forefront of the net zero transition with climate action and spearheading sustainability initiatives. But, to effectively lead this charge, they need access to training and upskilling opportunities. Whether through formal education, vocational training, or informal programmes, acquiring green skills is essential to tackle climate challenges and lead communities in climate adaptation efforts. Youth-led green businesses and start-ups are already emerging across India, introducing innovative solutions to environmental issues. By leveraging their creativity, digital expertise, and future-oriented thinking, youngsters are playing a pivotal role in reshaping the green economy. As leaders in green entrepreneurship, they are laying the groundwork for a sustainable future, driving economic and environmental progress.

The government has recognised the need to invest in green skills and the Green Skill Development Programme, for instance, aims to skill youth in fields related to the environment, renewable energy, forestry, wildlife conservation, and climate change. Such programmes are essential to ensure that India's future workforce is equipped to handle the demands of a green economy. There is also a growing shift in academic curricula, with an increasing emphasis on environmental education and sustainability.

However, there is still a need to align skilling courses and academic programmes with the specific needs of the green economy. This is a pivotal moment for India, as the youth have the potential not only to transform industries but also to drive a broader cultural shift towards sustainability in business, employment, and everyday life.

Balaji Vharkat is Climate Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Officer, and Priyanka Shendage is State Consultant, UNICEF Mumbai.

SCHOLARSHIPS

OakNorth STEM Scholarship and Mentorship Programme
Eligibility: Girls from Haryana, Uttarakhand, and Bihar who are in any year of a STEM-related graduation course in government institutions and have scored 80% or above in Class 12 and 65% in the previous year. Annual family income must be less than ₹ 3.5 lakh.
Rewards: ₹30,000
Application: Online
Deadline: December 31
www.b4s.in/edge/ONSS3

Programme in Mathematics for Young Scientists (PROMYS)
Eligibility: Students in Classes 9-12 who are least 15 years on May 11, 2025
Rewards: Covers tuition fees and other benefits.
Application: Online
Deadline: January 15
www.b4s.in/edge/PROM2

Tata Capital Pankh Scholarship
Eligibility: Students in Classes 11 or 12, degree, diploma or ITI courses at recognised institutions who have scored at least 60% in the preceding class. Annual family income must be less than or equal to ₹ 2.5 lakh.
Rewards: Variable
Application: Online
Deadline: January 15
www.b4s.in/edge/TCPS27

Courtesy: buddy4study.com

Dangerous skies

The Russia-Ukraine war poses great risk for airlines operating in the region

The crash of an Azerbaijani airliner near the Kazakhstani city of Aktau that killed 38 people has again brought into focus the danger of flying over the Russia-Ukraine conflict zone. The Embraer 190 was en route from Baku to Russia's Grozny when it was diverted and attempted an emergency landing some kilometres from Aktau. While initial fears centered around a bird hit, government and media reports have increasingly pointed at a misguided Russian anti-drone attack on the plane. Holes in the plane and videos of oxygen masks releasing would indicate depressurisation. The aircraft was still airborne after the attack, eventually crossing the Caspian Sea on the east, a distance of some 300 miles as the crow flies. Reports talk about the plane's control system being damaged, which would possibly explain its loopy flight paths, and permission being denied to the damaged aircraft to land in nearby airports although norms would allow a damaged civilian plane to land anywhere close. The Cockpit Voice Recorder and the Digital Flight Data Recorder have been recovered, which would reveal much information. Azerbaijan has sovereignty over the flight and the Brazilian manufacturer, Embraer, would also be party to the multi-stakeholder investigation that would reveal the cause of the accident, the course of events, and whether and how the control systems of the flight were affected. The last would indicate the role, if any, played by jamming systems that are part of air and drone defence.

Azerbaijani and U.S. officials have blamed Russian air defence systems responding to a Ukrainian attack likely with drones. Russian President Vladimir Putin apologised to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev "for the fact that the tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace". In this half-hearted apology, he stopped short of acknowledging active Russian involvement or that it was collateral damage to Azerbaijan, a Russian ally. That the plane was damaged nearly 500 miles from the Ukrainian border has shown the state of warfare today, in which drones and microdrones have moved centrestage as low-cost weapons capable of strikes and surveillance across broad swathes of enemy territory causing much damage deep inside enemy territory. If the Kazakhstan air crash calls for one urgent response, it is for the de-escalation of military action in the region, the success of which would depend preponderantly on Moscow's willingness to end its invasion of Ukraine and an agreement on limiting the expansion of NATO. Failure to do so now risks not only collateral damage resulting in such avoidable loss of innocent lives, but could also see more regional actors getting pulled into the conflict.

Korean drama

South Korea's political class must prioritise constitutional stability

Over the decades, South Korea has evolved from a brutal military dictatorship to a pro-business democracy. But this journey has also been bundled with controversies involving corruption, abuse of power and political vendetta. The impeachment of the acting President, Han Duck-soo, who took charge a few days earlier following the impeachment vote against President Yoon Suk Yeol, exemplifies the vulnerabilities in the political system. Governance has been in a paralysed state ever since Mr. Yoon became President in 2022. While he won on a thin margin, the opposition Democratic Party took control of the National Assembly. Controversies and scandals followed and his approval rating tanked to below 20%. In April this year, the Democratic Party won the legislative election again, widening its lead in Parliament. As the chasm between the presidency and the opposition-controlled National Assembly widened, Mr. Yoon declared martial law earlier this month, which triggered instant protests from political quarters and the public. In a country that still keeps the dark memories of its not-so-distant military dictatorships, his move was seen as an extreme measure aimed at torpedoing its democracy. He was impeached and Prime Minister Han stepped in as the interim leader. But his tenure has also proved short-lived.

This is the first time South Korea is impeaching an interim leader. The crux of the dispute was Mr. Han's refusal to appoint three judges to fill vacancies at the nine-member Constitutional Court. According to South Korea's Constitution, a President will be stripped of powers as soon as they are impeached in Parliament but to remove them from office, at least six judges in the Constitutional Court should rule in favour of the impeachment. The opposition accused Mr. Han of delaying the constitutional process, while Mr. Han and the ruling People's Power Party argued that only an elected President has the powers to sign off appointments for the Constitutional Court. This would mean that the political and constitutional crisis is expected to persist for the foreseeable future at a time when South Korea is grappling with economic woes and also security challenges from the North. A prolonged crisis and paralysis in governance could also weaken the political institutions and empower anti-democratic forces which were in power until the late 1980s. This is perhaps the deepest crisis South Korea is facing since its transition into a democracy. Its fractious political class should prioritise constitutional stability over narrow political interests. The new acting President should strive for consensus with the key parties on appointments to the Constitutional Court and expedite the impeachment proceedings against Mr. Yoon.

Incidents on loop, but it's escape for regulator, airlines

Captain A. (Mohan) Ranganathan

a former airline instructor pilot and aviation safety adviser. He is also a former member of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), India

The recent incident, on December 5, 2024, involving an Air India Airbus A320 aircraft at Goa's Mopa airport is another wake-up call for Indian aviation. The crew of the Hyderabad-bound aircraft had to reject takeoff after entering a parallel taxiway instead of the main runway. This is not the first time an event such as this has happened to airlines in India. This falls under the category of runway confusion. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the regulatory body that primarily deals with safety issues, as we have seen during the past 20 years, will blame the pilots and sweep the report under the carpet. The blame, squarely, points to the regulator and the airlines. It has failed to learn from earlier events.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)'s Annex 13 makes it mandatory for a member-state to investigate accidents, serious incidents and also incidents and identify the cause and take corrective steps to prevent a recurrence.

Series of incidents

The history of runway confusion errors by Indian carriers is long. In 1993, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 inaugural flight to Coimbatore landed at the Sulur air base of the Indian Air Force instead of Peelamedu civil airport. In September 2002, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 landed on the taxi track in Dabolim airport in Goa. In June 2007, a Spicejet Boeing 737 landed on the wrong runway at Delhi. In December 2008, a Spicejet Boeing 737 landed on a wrong runway at Kolkata. In March 2009, a Jetlite CRJ landed on a wrong runway at Kolkata. In September 2018, an Air India Airbus A320 on the Delhi-Thiruvananthapuram-Male sector landed on a wrong (under construction) runway in the Maldives.

Just a month earlier, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 had to abort takeoff while on a taxiway at Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. In January 2014, an Air India Boeing 787 almost landed at Melbourne's Essenden airport before air traffic control directed the crew to Melbourne Tullamarine airport. And in December 2020, a Spicejet Boeing 737 had a hard touchdown short of the runway threshold in Guwahati, Assam.

> That frequent and the same kind of serious aviation incidents keep recurring in India points to deficiencies in regulation and training standards

Had the DGCA and the airlines concerned taken proactive and corrective steps, India would not have to cut a sorry figure in international aviation. India is lucky that none of these events resulted in fatalities. The blame is apportioned to pilot error while the airlines and the regulator walk away without accountability.

In June 2010, in the first meeting of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), formed after the Mangaluru crash of an Air India Express flight (May 2010), this writer had highlighted some of the events, between 2002 and 2009, in a presentation before the Union Minister of Civil Aviation. If such serious incidents are still taking place in 2024, the blame falls squarely on the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the DGCA and the airlines for their failure to prevent a recurrence.

Singapore took corrective measures

Contrast this with an incident involving a Singapore Airlines flight in Taiwan on October 31, 2000. The crew were trying to expedite their departure before the airport closed due to a typhoon. They took off from a wrong runway which had been partially closed. The aircraft crashed into construction equipment, exploded in a fire and several passengers died. It was night, in heavy rain and with strong winds. Singapore took corrective measures and there has not been a serious incident till date. Can India not learn from them?

Airlines in India have had a repeated number of accidents involving high and fast approaches, resulting in runway overruns since 2005. In October 2005, an Air Sahara Boeing 737 went off the runway at Mumbai and there was serious damage to the aircraft. In March 2015 a Spicejet DH8-D sustained damage during a runway excursion on landing in Hubli. In July 2019, a Spicejet Boeing 737 overran the runway in Mumbai on landing and was damaged. In December 2016, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 went off the runway at Goa after a rejected take off

A majority of those aircraft have resulted in hull losses and some such as the Mangaluru and Kozhikode (2020) crashes have resulted in the loss of 179 lives. In all those overrun accidents, pilots have been blamed but never the poor training and safety standards of airlines, the non-compliance with ICAO standards on aerodrome infrastructure and the failure of the DGCA's and Airport Authority of India's safety audits that have covered up serious deficiencies. The Flight Standards Directorate of the DGCA – which is supposed to oversee standards – has failed miserably, as it is the same type of accidents that have occurred and aircraft have been written off.

Pressure on crew

India has one of the worst set of regulations on flight and duty time limitations for flight crew. Pilots and cabin attendants are pressured to operate in violation of flight time limits, flight duty limits and rest periods. The new addition to pressure on flight deck crew is the hydra-headed monster called "on time performance", or OTP. Many of these errors can be attributed to the OTP pressure and failure of crew resource management in the cockpit.

In the Kozhikode crash, the captain was in a hurry to land because he was required to operate the next day's flight. The accident is a classic case of "press-on-it is" where, once the pilot gets fixed on to the landing strip, no inputs are received from the other pilot. The same happened in the Mangaluru accident. Repeated calls by the co-pilot to go around were ignored.

The incident, in Mopa, Goa, shows a lack of knowledge of runway markings by the pilots. Runways and not the taxi track have specific markings. Pilots landing short is also an indication of a lack of knowledge of runway markings and non-compliance of stabilised approach criteria. Airline training and safety departments should wake up and address these serious training deficiencies.

India has to move from the old adage,"If a pilot is alive, blame him. If he is dead, bury him". The recent deferment of flight and duty time limits at the behest of airline managements is a serious safety issue. To add fuel to the fire is a High Court decision asking the DGCA to negotiate with the two sides to find a suitable solution. Safety and fatigue are not negotiable. This is another instance of the judiciary having no clue about aviation safety.

One Nation One Election and representative democracy

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The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, that was tabled in the Lok Sabha, proposes simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State/Union Territory Legislative Assemblies with the insertion of Article 82(A). This ambitious reform seeks to synchronise elections, fix the tenure of the Lok Sabha, and simultaneously align elections to the State Assemblies. If the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly is dissolved before its five-year term, mid-term elections will only cover the remainder of the original tenure.

The Bill also amends Articles 83, 172, and 327, with changes effective from an 'appointed date', post-2029 general elections, thereby initiating simultaneous elections in 2034. A second Bill, the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, aligns the tenure of Union Territories' legislative Assemblies with the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

While the proposal seeks administrative efficiency and reduced election fatigue, critical questions arise: has the 'One Nation, One Election (ONOE)' process been truly inclusive and representative? Are there limits to our understanding of the representative spirit of Indian democracy?

Understanding representative democracy

Representative democracy is a system wherein citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf. Rooted in the principles of free and fair elections, political accountability, and the protection of individual rights, it balances majority rule with the protection of minority interests. This form of governance becomes especially critical in diverse and populous countries such as India.

The theoretical underpinnings emphasise that elected representatives act as intermediaries, ensuring stable governance while accommodating competing interests. Citizens, being too numerous and diverse to participate directly in governance, delegate authority to their elected representatives. The system thrives on periodic elections, informed citizen participation, and institutional checks and balances.

Despite its theoretical merits, representative democracy faces growing challenges in practice. A 2024 Pew Research Center study across 24 nations, including Brazil, India, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States, revealed widespread disillusionment with the system. Citizens increasingly questioned its effectiveness, with some exploring alternatives such as direct democracy, expert rule, or even authoritarian regimes.

> The process adopted for the One Nation One Election Bill had lapses that affect India's democratic fabric

In 13 countries, significant segments supported strong leaders bypassing parliamentary checks, reflecting frustration with institutional inefficiencies. Alarmingly, military rule garnered between 15% to 17% support in nations such as Greece, Japan, the U.K., and the U.S. Such trends underscore growing distrust in representative systems, driven by perceived inefficiencies, corruption, and unfulfilled promises.

Jayaprakash Narayan's critique

In India, debates about representative democracy are not new. Jayaprakash Narayan, in his seminal work, *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity* (1959), offered a deep critique of parliamentary democracy. JP argued that the reliance on individual voting created an 'atomized society', where fragmented, partisan politics overshadowed the collective national interest.

JP highlighted the following defects – risks of minority governments: In a multi-party system like India, he warned that parliamentary democracy risks unstable and unrepresentative governments.

First, demagoguery and populism: JP highlighted how political parties manipulate public opinion through half-truths, empty promises, and divisive rhetoric.

Second, centralisation of power: Parliamentary democracy, according to JP, concentrates power in the state, weakening intermediary institutions between citizens and the national government.

Third, financial costs of elections: JP critiqued the exorbitant cost of elections, tethering democracy to moneyed interests and large organisations.

While critical, JP's analysis aimed to reform and strengthen democracy. His concerns resonate today as India debates ONOE and its implications for democratic representation.

For a reform as significant as ONOE, an inclusive and representative process is crucial. In representative democracies, public opinion shapes policy, holding governments accountable to citizens' aspirations and concerns. To achieve this, pre-legislative consultation becomes indispensable, enabling policymakers to gather diverse views, address challenges, and enhance transparency.

The Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy, 2014, mandates a minimum 30-day period for public feedback on proposed legislation. It requires draft Bills to be accompanied by explanatory notes that clarify key provisions in accessible terms. However, the process adopted for ONOE fell short. First, inadequate consultation period: The high-level committee issued a public notice on January 5, 2024, inviting suggestions on ONOE. Citizens were given just 10 days – until January 15 – to respond, undermining the spirit of the 2014 policy. Second, lack of explanatory material: Despite the high-level committee being established in September 2023, no explanatory notes or background papers were provided, limiting citizens' understanding of the proposal's scope and challenges. Third, framing of questions: The high-level committee's approach, seeking 'yes/no' responses on supporting ONOE, appeared perfunctory, giving the impression the matter was already settled.

Such procedural lapses risk alienating citizens and stakeholders, undermining trust in the reform process. In a diverse democracy like India, meaningful public engagement is vital to ensure that policy reflects varied perspectives and fosters consensus.

Implications for representative democracy

The ONOE Bill raises critical questions about the representative nature of Indian democracy. First, centralisation versus federalism: synchronising elections risks a further centralising of power, potentially undermining the federal spirit of the Constitution. State-specific issues may be overshadowed by national narratives. Second, inclusivity and participation: by curtailing consultation and rushing reforms, the government risks sidelining citizens' voices, weakening democratic inclusivity. Third, electoral accountability: frequent elections, while resource-intensive, enhance accountability by enabling voters to evaluate governments regularly. Simultaneous elections could dilute this accountability.

India's democratic fabric thrives on citizen participation, inclusivity, and accountability. Reforms such as ONOE, while aimed at efficiency, must not compromise these principles. A rushed process undermines trust and risks centralisation. Only by adhering to the principles above can our democracy remain truly representative in letter and spirit.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Manmohan Singh

While Dr. Manmohan Singh deserves everybody's applause for his economic reforms — along with the former Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao — that steered India away from a big crisis, it is to be noted that the great economist's knowledge and talent were sidelined by the Congress party.

The party only used the great man as a tool to rule the country for 10 years. The economic reforms of 1991 have not been properly handled by successive governments which resulted in the country and the common people being dragged into debt traps and a westernisation of social life. But there is a positive side. The former Prime Minister's voracious book-reading habit has to be utilised to inspire the youth and the children of today who are habituated to online reading. This is not as beneficial and effective as having a proper book in their hands and reading it.

M. Chandrasekhar,
Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

It was Dr. Singh's vision that transformed India into a hub for innovation and growth, laying the foundation for its emergence as a global economic powerhouse. His contributions underscore the transformative power of leadership rooted in pragmatism and foresight, leaving an indelible mark on modern India.

Avineshwar Bhardwaj,
Darbhanga, Bihar

India has lost a statesman and a fine economist. Dr. Singh may have slipped into the pages of history but he will live forever in the heart of every Indian.

Devendra Khurana
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

I had the privilege of being present at Dr. Singh's visit to Somayajulapalli village in Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh, in 2004, when he laid the foundation stone for a minor irrigation tank. The Kurnool District Collector, Ajay Jain, explained the salient features of the project to Dr. Singh. I was the superintending engineer, irrigation circle, Kurnool, from February 2002 to June 2004. Dr. Singh evinced keen interest, eliciting many details as well as asking about the irrigation outlook in the district.

Y. Abdul Basheer,
Hyderabad

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address.

Restoring constitutional order in Manipur

John Simte
Lawyer and researcher

An editorial titled 'Welcome spotlight: On the Supreme Court directive to Manipur government' published in *The Hindu* on December 14, 2024, rightly mentions that the executive's reticence and lack of accountability, both at the federal and State levels, for the unrelenting ethnic violence in Manipur has again forced the higher judiciary to intervene. However, we must be circumspect in projecting the Supreme Court as a benevolent institutional actor that has dutifully responded with alacrity matched by requisite conviction, and concern to consistently hold the executive to account.

A thorough assessment of the Supreme Court's interventions in Manipur over the last 18 months and the incremental steps it can take to rebuild trust in the rule of law is at least merited. In general, we can witness a gradual slide towards institutional dereliction, complacency, and apathy that is unbecoming of a Constitutional Court meant for all Indians. This is evident from the fact that, except for the last hearing on December 9, where it sought details of destroyed and encroached properties, the court did not hold any effective hearings or pass corresponding orders in 2024.

Throughout this year, the main batch of petitions on Manipur was heard only six times. In other words, the court functioned as if its writ jurisdiction had ceased to extend to Manipur, even as 2024 saw some of the bloodiest phases of violence and gruesome killing of innocent victims belonging to both warring ethnic communities. Adding to this are the continuation of various events that emerged on or after May 3, 2023, and are unprecedented in the life of our republic. The list of illustrations is lengthy and extensive – the demographic and geographical separation of the State and its enforcement through a militarised buffer zone, the State's complete surrender over the monopoly of violence and law and order to armed militant groups, and the administration of an illegal, hateful ethno-cultural oath to legislators by the Arambai Tenggol.

On some occasions, the Supreme Court did respond, especially when it took suo moto cognisance after a video depicting tribal women being sexually assaulted and paraded naked by a mob went viral on social media. But its responses were episodic across several months in 2023, only to remain largely absent in 2024. This is evident as magisterial courts in Assam, to whom the Supreme Court had given charge of pre-trial procedures, await its directions to take cognisance of the chargesheets filed and begin the trial. For instance, the trial is yet to begin in the case of the sexual assault and naked parade of two tribal women, even though the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had filed chargesheets against six accused persons, including a juvenile, in October 2023.

In an order dated August 7, 2023, the Supreme Court had directed: the formation of a committee of three retired judges, led by Justice Gita Mittal, to look into all matters of relief and rehabilitation; the constitution of 42 Special Investigation Teams (SITs) in six groups based on the crimes, comprising CBI officers drawn from cadres/States and headed by a retired Director-General of Police. By all accounts, the functioning of the former has been reduced to a mechanical, bureaucratic ritual of filing occasional reports. Several tribal student organisations have since also filed separate pleas before the Supreme Court for relocating displaced students to other universities and professional institutes. Simultaneously, a report in *The Hindu* (December 18, 2024) stated that chargesheets for only 6% (192 cases) out of 3,023 registered cases have been filed by the SIT till November 20, 2024. It remains unclear how much of the structure envisioned for the SITs by the Supreme Court is still intact, as publicly available information suggests that multiple IPS officers on deputation to the SITs from Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and Delhi have either sought repatriation or have already been repatriated back to their home cadres.

> The SITs should be directed to fill the existing informational vacuum and provide timely updates to petitioners and the families of deceased victims about the progress of the investigations and trials

Crucial measures

These directions, initially viewed with a high degree of optimism, have overwhelmingly failed to instill any sense of justice among the people of Manipur or arrest their feelings of institutional neglect and the complete erosion of the rule of law. Now that the Supreme Court appears to have turned its attention back to Manipur, it must undertake the following measures to provide the State with a much-needed healing touch.

First, given the volatile situation in Manipur, inimical to a fair criminal justice system, the trials of cases investigated by the SITs should be transferred forthwith outside Manipur, and the appropriate trial courts should be allowed to take cognisance of chargesheets already filed. Second, the SITs should be directed to fill the existing informational vacuum and provide timely updates to petitioners and the families of deceased victims about the progress of the investigations and trials.

Thirdly, considering the enormity of multi-faceted issues arising from the conflict in Manipur that persist and are likely to continue due to the sharp governance deficit, a bipartisan High Powered Commission comprising eminent persons, including members from both conflicting communities, should be constituted. This commission, in turn, be directed to report its findings directly to a Special Bench of the Supreme Court, which should be given the task of exclusively hearing cases related to the ethnic violence in Manipur.

A case for pragmatic approach in T.N.

The conflict over V-C appointments has left six universities without leadership

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan
ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in

Immediately after Govi Chezhiaan, a three-time legislator from Thiruvidaimaruthur in Tamil Nadu's Cauvery delta and a member of SC community, was inducted as the Higher Education Minister in late September, he sounded conciliatory towards Governor-Chancellor R.N. Ravi, with whom the DMK government has been having a running battle over many matters, especially over appointment of Vice-Chancellors (V-Cs) to various universities.

When Mr. Chezhiaan interacted with the media for the first time as Minister, he conveyed the advice given to him by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin: to avoid tussles and follow the rules and regulations in the interest of the students. However, in no time, the expectations of a cordial relationship between the Governor and the State government disappeared with old issues getting revived.

In the past week, the State witnessed a familiar controversy between the two institutions over the appointment of V-Cs. The trigger for the latest round came when Mr. Ravi objected on December 18 to a government order, issued on December 9, on the constitution of a search committee for shortlisting a set of candidates for V-C of the Annamalai University. According to the Governor, this order, which had ignored the 2018 UGC Regulations [7.3 - ii] on the subject by excluding the nominee of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman from the panel, "violates Supreme Court judgments." As per the regulations, there has to be a panel of 3-5 persons, including a nominee of the UGC chief, for the selection of V-Cs of State, private, and 'deemed to be' universities.

The next day, Mr. Chezhiaan issued a statement. He stated that the State government had been following laws enacted by the State legislature. It did not accept the stipulation concerned (7.3 - ii) when its Higher Education department came out with an order in January 2021. The order, issued by the previous AIADMK regime, had marked the general acceptance of the UGC Regulations on minimum qualifications for the appointment of teachers and other academic staff in universities and colleges under the control of the State Higher Education department. However, the order was categorical in stating that the "appointment and selection of the Vice-Chancellor" of 12 universities would be governed by provisions of the Tamil Nadu Universities Laws (amendment), 2017, and in respect of Madras University, the existing provisions of the relevant 1923 law would do.

He further contended that it was the "prerogative" of the State government to accept the regulations, which were "only recommendations" in nature. He also quoted the Supreme Court's verdict in the *Jagdish Prasad Sharma vs State Of Bihar* (2013) case, that said "Education now being a List III subject, the State government is at liberty to frame its own laws relating to education in the State and is not, therefore, bound to accept or follow the regulations framed by the UGC" and in the event of the States' willingness to adopt the regulations, they would have to abide by the conditions laid down by the Commission.

In fact, on the very same issue, the Governor, in 2023, issued notifications constituting Search-cum-Selection Committees for the identification of candidates for appointment of V-Cs of the Bharathiar, Madras, and the Tamil Nadu Teachers Education Universities. This prompted the State government to approach the Supreme Court in November 2023, where the case was pending. In January this year, Mr. Ravi took back the notifications.

Subsequent to the Minister's response, there was one more round of exchange of words between him and Mr. Ravi. But, what is at stake is the fate of six universities, which do not have V-Cs for months, the earliest vacancy being at Bharathiar University since October 2022. Madras University has remained headless since August 2023. In addition, there are two universities wherein the extended tenure of V-Cs is due for expiry in February and May 2025. Ironically, it was to ensure that universities enjoyed the continuity of V-Cs that the State, in May 2017, promulgated ordinances.

Notwithstanding the correctness or otherwise of the respective position of the Governor and the State government, both institutions, in the interests of the students, should adopt a pragmatic approach and resolve all the outstanding issues as early as possible.

36% of TB patients in four T.N. districts are migrants: survey

Migrants with TB face greater disadvantages and require clinical, social, and economic support

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

A recent report by the Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health (REACH) highlights efforts to address tuberculosis (TB) among migrants in Tamil Nadu. Several challenges, including loss to follow-up, occupational risks in hazardous environments, and lack of official documentation, hinder diagnosis and treatment for this vulnerable group.

In collaboration with the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) and with support from the STOP TB Partnership, REACH implemented a pilot intervention in four Tamil Nadu districts – Chennai, Coimbatore, Kancheepuram, and Vellore – from July 2023 to December 2024.

As part of the project, people with TB at selected health facilities were screened to identify migrants among them. Of the 11,564 TB patients screened, the majority were aged 15-59 years (77%, **Chart 1**) and male (66%, **Chart 2**). Significantly, 36.6% were migrants **(Chart 3)**, with 2.2% of these cases being drug-resistant TB. Based on drug resistance status, additional nutritional support, such as enhanced dry rations, was provided.

Migrants were categorised by their location. Over 62% were identified as those transferring out of the intervention districts to other districts or States, while about 22% resided in another district but came to the intervention districts for medication **(Chart 4)**.

A co-morbidity study among these migrants revealed that 29% were undernourished, 27% had diabetes, and 25% consumed alcohol **(Chart 5)**. Mapping inter-State migrant TB cases showed that most transfers occurred in West Bengal, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand **(Chart 6)**. **Chart 7** depicts intra-State TB migrants.

TB and its impact on **migrants**

The data for the charts were sourced from an impact report prepared by REACH in partnership with the Stop TB Partnership and the National TB Elimination Programme

- REACH, or the Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health, is an India-based non-profit organisation, established in Chennai
- The Stop TB Partnership is a hosted entity of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

CHART 1

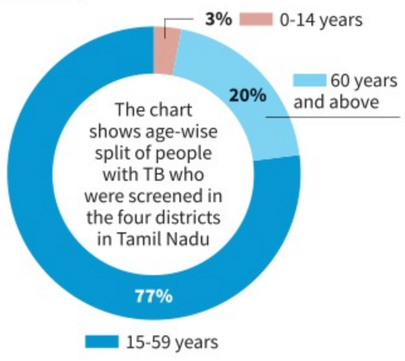

3%
0-14 years
20%
60 years and above
The chart shows age-wise split of people with TB who were screened in the four districts in Tamil Nadu
77%
15-59 years

Chart 2: The chart shows the gender-wise split of people with TB who were screened

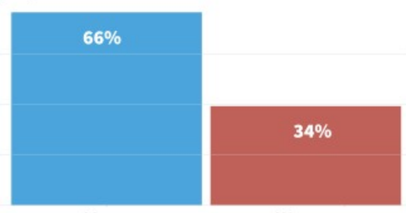
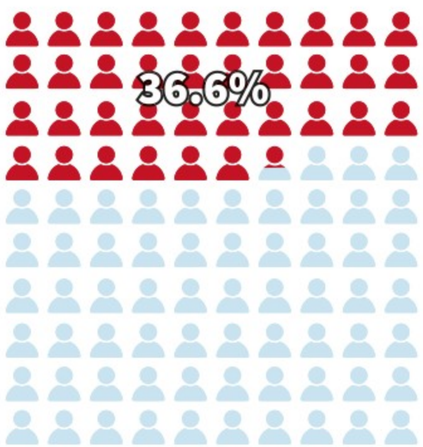
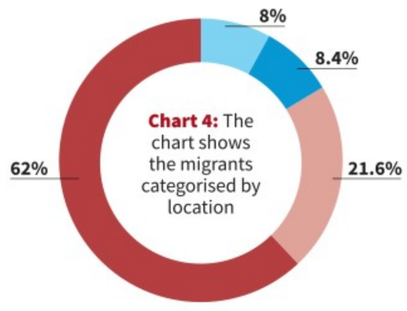


Chart 3: Chart shows the share of migrants among those who were screened in the four districts in Tamil Nadu





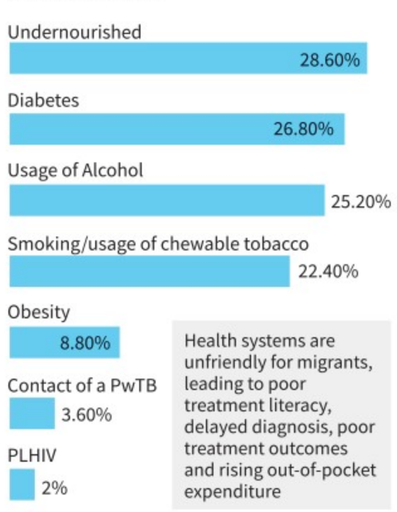
Currently living in another district and comes to the intervention districts only to get medicines (n=917)

Been currently living in and getting TB services in place that is not their usual place of residence (within the last 5 years) (n=339)

Transferred-in to the project implementation district from other districts/ States where they diagnosed (n=354)

Transferred out of the project implementation districts to other districts/ States (n=2,628)

Chart 5: A co-morbidity study among these migrants revealed that 29% were undernourished, 27% had diabetes, and 25% consumed alcohol



Health systems are unfriendly for migrants, leading to poor treatment literacy, delayed diagnosis, poor treatment outcomes and rising out-of-pocket expenditure

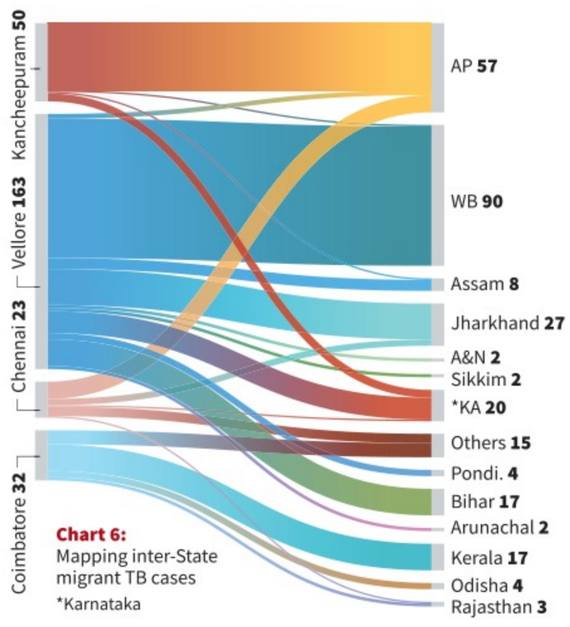


Chart 6: Mapping inter-State migrant TB cases
*Karnataka

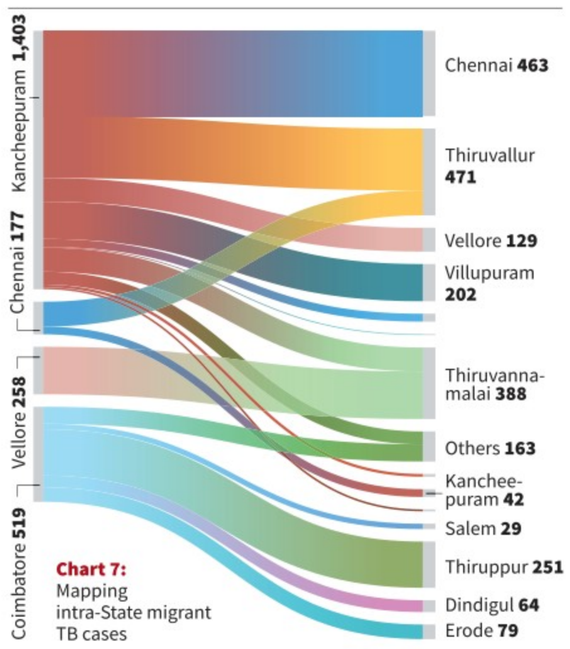


Chart 7: Mapping intra-State migrant TB cases

FROM THE ARCHIVES
The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 30, 1974

Disappointing Year for Hides & Skins

MADRAS, Dec. 30: The year 1974 for the East India tanning industry and leather trade was one of continuous crisis which not only sapped the resourcefulness of the industry but killed the buoyancy and optimism which have been its special qualities.

The performance of the tanning industry in Madras during the year that has just ended has been thoroughly disappointing with a fall of about 50 per cent in production and exports. Representations made to the Central Government from time to time for the revival of the industry and trade made no impact and the situation continued to drift. The world economic situation raised new problems and under the present restrictive policies of the Government, even if the industry takes voluntary measures to rehabilitate itself, it is rather doubtful if it would bear fruit.

There has been a world wide slump in raw hides especially America and the Continent as a result of increased production due to shortage of cattle feed. The forecast of production for the New Year is also on the higher side. World raw material prices have dropped to 1960-62 levels and Indian leather with its high cost of production and export duties seems to be pricing itself out of the overseas markets.

The development of tanning techniques in African and Middle Eastern countries has created a situation where India is being fastly replaced by those countries.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 30, 1924

I. C. S. Examination.

The following press communique dated December 23 has been issued:–

An open Competitive Examination for the Indian Civil-Service will be held in London commencing on the 1st August 1925. The age of the candidates on the 1st August 1925 must be less than 24 years but not less than 21 years. Applications from intending candidates must reach the Secretary, Civil Service Commission, on or before the 15th May 1925. Copies of the form of applications and other particulars can be obtained from the Director of Public Instruction, Madras. Detailed rules and regulations and a syllabus of the examination will be published in the Fort St. George Gazette.

From Page One

179 killed as S. Korean flight crash-lands

Senior Transport Ministry official Joo Jong-wan said workers had retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box. He said it may take months for investigators to complete their probe. The runway at the Muan airport will be closed until January 1, the Ministry said. Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals.

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra expressed deep condolences to the families of those affected by the accident in a post on X. She said she ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide assistance immediately.

Kerati Kijmanawat, the Director of Airports of Thailand, confirmed in a statement that Jeju Air flight 7C 2216 departed from Suvarnabhumi Airport with no reports of abnormal conditions with the aircraft or on the runway.

Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident."

In a televised news conference, Kim E-bae, Jeju Air's president apologised to bereaved families and said he feels "full responsibility" for the incident. Mr. Kim said the company had not identified any mechanical problems with the aircraft following regular checkups and that he would wait for the results of government investigations into the cause of the incident.

Boeing said in a statement on X it was in contact with Jeju Air and was ready to support the company in dealing with the crash.

"We extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones, and our thoughts remain with the passengers and crew," Boeing said.

The incident came as South Korea is embroiled in a huge political crisis triggered by President Yoon Suk Yeol's imposition of martial law and ensuing impeachment. Last Friday, South Korean lawmakers impeached acting President Han Duck-soo and suspended his duties, leading Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok to take over.

AAP, BJP trade charges of voter list fraud

The AAP chief claimed that when the party verified 500 of the 5,000 applications for deletions, they found that 408 of those voters had been living at their addresses for the past 20 to 30 years. "This means valid, existing voters are being deleted. Deleting a legitimate citizen's vote effectively strips them of their citizenship," he said.

In one house, 47 votes were added, and in another, 22 votes were added, Mr. Kejriwal claimed. However, when inspected, these houses were found to be non-existent and this showed that it was a clear case of fraud, he added. Noting that there are 1.06 lakh voters in the New Delhi constituency, the AAP supremo claimed that the BJP was trying to delete 5% of the electorate and add 7.5% new voters. "This would amount to tampering with 12% of the votes. If 12% of the votes are manipulated, there's no point in holding elections as the process loses all fairness. This is a blatant and brazen act of misconduct," he added.

Meanwhile, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva accused the AAP of "manipulatng" the electoral roll. "In Narela alone, over 2,000 people applied for new voter registrations on December 24. Similar applications have been observed in various constituencies on December 25, 26, and 27. This is not mere coincidence but evidence of Mr. Kejriwal's manipulation plan affecting 70 constituencies," he said.

2025 may ring in small savings rate cuts

While the case for rate cutting cycle is in place starting with next quarter, government may defer its initiation till April for better optics as reduction amid high inflation, with important Assembly polls around the corner, may not go down well with voters, say experts; rates were last cut in 2020

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

Investors in small savings schemes should brace themselves for a year of interest rate cuts, and the first reduction in returns on these schemes may come as early as this week when the government resets rates for the January to March quarter.

While the case for a rate cutting cycle is in place starting with the upcoming quarter, the government may defer its initiation till April for better optics as a reduction amid high inflation, with an important Assembly election around the corner, may not go down well, experts believe.

The government had last slashed rates on small savings schemes in April 2020, in the range of 0.5% to 1.4% on different instruments, bringing the return on Public Provident Fund (PPF) savings to 7.1% from 7.9% prevalent till then.

Although the PPF rate has remained unchanged since then, the Centre began hiking rates on other small savings instruments from October 2022.

"Since Q3 [third quarter] of 2022-23, interest rates on various small savings instruments have been cumulatively increased in the range of 70 to 250 basis points (bps) by the Government of India [GoI]," the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had noted in its October bulletin. One basis point equals 0.01%.

"The GoI kept rates on small savings schemes unchanged for Q3:2024-25. Rates on most of the small savings instruments are now above the formula-based rates, except rates on public provident funds and post office recurring deposits," the RBI had noted, estimating the Q3 returns were a tad under 40 bps higher than the formula for most schemes.

Growing gap

The table shows the interest rates on various small savings schemes for the third quarter of the fiscal year 2024-25

Small savings schemes	GoI announced interest rates (%)	Gap from formula-based interest rates (% points)
Savings deposit	4	—
Public Provident Fund	7.1	-0.24
One-year*	6.9	+0.09
Two-year*	7	+0.19
Three-year*	7.1	+0.28
Five-year*	7.5	+0.42
Recurring deposit account	6.7	-0.12
Monthly income scheme	7.4	+0.36
Kisan Vikas Patra	7.5	+0.41
NSC VIII issue	7.7	+0.44
Senior Citizens Savings Scheme	8.2	+0.37
Sukanya Samriddhi Scheme	8.2	+0.36

* Term Deposits

SOURCE: RBI

G-sec yields

Since October this year, government securities (G-sec) yields, to which small savings returns were linked in 2016 based on a formula, have eased further, and that trend is likely to persist in the coming year.

"The interest rates on most small savings schemes are well above the corresponding G-sec yields, with the spreads between the two widening further over the acceptable levels during the last few months, owing to a dip in the latter during this period. This suggests that there is room to cut small savings rates for Q4 of 2024-2025," Aditi Nayar, ICRA chief economist, told *The Hindu*.

Bank of Baroda chief economist Madan Sabnavis agreed there is a "theoretical case" for rate cuts but this may not be the right time to effect a reduction as inflation is still high and there is a feeling that consumption is taking a hit.

Moreover, he noted that these schemes are targeted at more vulnerable sections of society and senior citizens.

Tepid inflows

Incidentally, the inflows on account of savings deposits and certificates and the PPF have been quite tepid during April-October 2024, amounting to just about 37% of the budgeted amount during this period (compared to around 50% in the year ago period) as per Controller General of Accounts (CGA) data.

This would likely prompt the government to keep rates unchanged for the coming quarter, Ms. Nayar reckoned. "However, amid the expectations of a policy rate cut in Q4 of 2024-25 and Q1 of 2025-26, we believe that the interest rates on small savings schemes are likely to be pared from the April-June 2025 quarter onwards, which will also aid in the transmission of monetary policy," she concluded.

Support for rate cuts

"During the course of the year 2025, there could be a stronger case for cutting rates on these schemes, particularly if the RBI cuts the repo rate. But a repo rate cut may not necessarily lower G-sec yields as other factors also play a part," Mr. Sabnavis noted.

"We expect the 10-year G-Sec yield to trade between 6.5% and 6.6% by the end of 2024-25 and between 6.1% and 6.3% by 2025-26," said CareEdge Ratings' chief economist Rajani Sinha.

'Siang project to help avert floods if China releases excess water'

Press Trust of India
ITANAGAR

Pema Khandu. PTI

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), estimated to cost ₹1.13 lakh crore, was being planned by the Centre not just for generating electricity but to maintain the natural flow of the river all year round and mitigate risks of flooding if China released excess water.

Mr. Khandu's remarks came in the wake of China approving the construction of the world's largest dam, at a cost of $137 billion, on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet close to the Indian border. The dam is to be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra river makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh.

"The SUMP, with an estimated installed capacity of 11,000 MW, is not just about generating power, but also about maintaining the natural flow of the Siang river and mitigating potential flood risks from water releases by China," Mr. Khandu told PTI in an interview.

Describing SUMP as a project of national importance, he said hydropower generation is only the secondary goal of it.

Objective of project

"The real objective of the project is to save the Siang river and the communities that have depended on it for generations," he said.

The survey for preparing the pre-feasibility report of the projects is yet to be done amid stiff opposition from locals who are concerned about displacement, loss of livelihoods, and environmental impact of the mega dam.

Warning of severe consequences if China's project moves ahead "without safeguards", Mr. Khandu said the neighbouring country's plans to divert water from the Brahmaputra into its arid regions could drastically reduce the flow of the Siang river during winters.

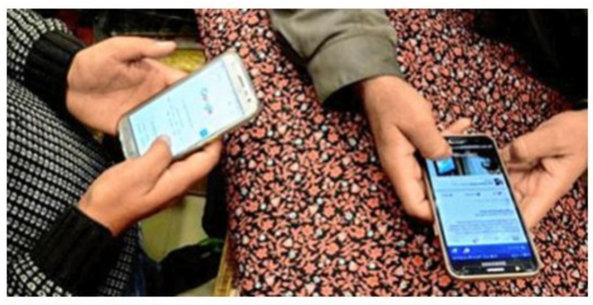
India shuts down Internet 60 times in 2024, the lowest in eight years

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

India saw the lowest number of mobile Internet shutdowns in eight years in 2024, rounding out a period where the country became the most frequent deployer in the world of the measure, according to data from the Internet Shutdowns Tracker, maintained by the Software Freedom Law Centre, India.

The reduction – there have been 60 shutdowns so far this year, with 96 last year – comes with fewer shutdowns imposed in Manipur and Jammu and Kashmir, where administrations have imposed a disproportionately high number of curbs in past years.

In the last month, shutdowns were imposed in Ambala, Haryana, as a result of planned farmer agitations, and extended in nine districts of Manipur owing to "the prevailing law and order situation in the State". The most Internet shutdowns – 132 – happened in 2020, following the revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution the previous year. An extension of an Internet shutdown is counted by SFLC as a fresh shutdown, as these curbs are usually imposed for a fixed number of days at a time.



No connectivity: The most shutdowns happened in 2020 after the abrogation of special status of J&K under Article 370. FILE PHOTO

Digital rights activists have bemoaned the constant use of shutdowns, arguing they are unnecessary and ineffective as a response to unrest. What's more, States do not always publish the shutdown orders as ordered by the Supreme Court. "Four years after the historic Bhasin versus Union of India judgment, officials continue to fail to publish shutdown orders and have been repeatedly corrected by courts for failing to comply," the advocacy group Access Now said in May.

"The contribution of the Internet for the well-being of citizens has to be balanced with the need to prevent misuse by anti-social elements requiring temporary suspensions of internet services," Union Minister of State for Communications Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar said in a written Rajya Sabha answer on December 12.

No study

The Union government reiterated in Parliament in the Winter Session that it did not have centralised data on Internet shutdowns across India and that it had not conducted any study on the efficacy of the measure. The Department of Telecommunications, under the Union Ministry of Communications, has issued the rules under which State and Union Territory authorities may order Internet shutdowns.

The lack of any study has been particularly marked as digital rights activists have pushed back against the practice, with shutdowns being employed dozens of times each year. It is also notable as parliamentarians have been pushing on whether a study has been conducted for years.

In November 2019, former Minister for Communications Ravi Shankar Prasad said in a written Rajya Sabha response that the government "has not undertaken any evaluation or study to assess the economic impacts of Internet shutdowns". Then Minister of State for Communications Sanjay Dhotre said in the Upper House in February 2020 that "records related to Internet shutdowns ordered by State governments are not maintained by either DoT or the Ministry of Home Affairs".

Mr. Dhotre said the same month that "DoT has not conducted any study on the effect of internet shutdown on economy, tourism, education sector etc". Similarly in 2021, he had said, "DoT has not conducted any study to calculate the economic cost of Internet shutdowns in the country."

In 2022, former MoS for Communications Devusinh Chauhan said that "DoT has not commissioned any study to assess the efficacy of internet shutdowns in dealing with public emergencies".

Security forces faced resurgence in militancy in Jammu region this year

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Security forces maintained an upper hand over militants in Kashmir in 2024 compared with the Jammu region, which saw itself in the throes of a full-blown militancy involving all 10 districts. The ratio of security personnel killed against militants in Jammu is far higher than the Valley, indicating a change in tack by militants in terms of training and survival tactics.

According to official data, the Jammu region witnessed the killing of 18 security personnel against 13 militants in around 30 contacts established either in ambushes or anti-militancy operations. In Kashmir, 55 militants were killed in anti-militancy operations, which left 10 security personnel dead.

It's the first time in many decades that security forces have taken more casualties, including officers and personnel of the elite PARA units of the Army, compared with militants in the Jammu region.

An official said militants started setting up bases in the Pir Panjal Valley (comprising Rajouri and Poonch districts) in 2020, first time since 2005, in the wake of revocation of Article 370 in 2019. This year, militants fanned out to new forest ridges of Kathua, Reasi, Doda, and Kishtwar and used out-of-bound passes, with no motorable access, to operate and carry out attacks, a senior official working in the Jammu region told *The Hindu*. The change in tack was evident both in terms of training level and survival tactics of these militants in the forest ranges, officials said. "They did turn forest covers and treacherous topography to their advantage," the official said.

Official data suggested that nine people were killed in militancy-related incidents in Doda, Kathua, and Reasi districts, five in Kishtwar, four in Udhampur, three in Jammu, three in Rajouri, and two in Poonch.

The security forces remain on tenterhooks in the Chenab Valley, especially in Udhampur, Reasi, Doda, and Kishtwar districts, as only 13 militants could be neutralised this year in the face of inputs about the presence of over 30 militants in the region. To match the militants' upscaling of tactics, a special unit of the National Security Guard, an elite force also known as Black Cats, has been stationed in Jammu for the first time this year.

Under attack: An official said militants started setting up bases in the Pir Panjal Valley in 2020, first time since 2005. FILE PHOTO

J&K also saw an increase in civilian deaths in militant attacks this year, with 16 killed in the Kashmir region and 14 in the Jammu region. These civilian casualties included nine pilgrims, who were killed in Jammu's Reasi on June 9, on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in. Three village defence guards were also killed by militants this year.

Militants also stepped up attacks in Srinagar after the return of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar from the Pakistan visit on October 17, a trip that failed to break ice between the two countries. His return was followed by a major attack on a tunnel project, a strategic project connecting Kashmir with Ladakh, in Ganderbal district and left seven, including six labourers and one doctor dead, on October 20.

Police officials said one local, Hakam Din, 45, was arrested in the Reasi attack and chargesheeted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for helping militants "to execute the attack with his active logistic support". The Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) 'commander', Junaid Ahmad Bhat, behind the Ganderbal attack was killed in Srinagar's Harwan area in December.

According to the J&K police data, the crackdown on militants and their supporters showed no let-up in Kashmir this year. Fourteen houses of militants and supporters have been attached and around 168 locals arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for acting as "overground workers" for the militants.

The Jammu region, once an infiltration route, is facing a full blown militancy this year, with militant sleeper cells operating in most districts.

Ex-IPS officer and Ayodhya dispute OSD dies in Patna

The Hindu Bureau
PATNA

Acharya Kishore Kunal, former IPS officer and founder secretary of Mahavir Mandir Trust, died of cardiac arrest in Patna on Sunday.

The 1972-batch IPS officer of Gujarat cadre had also served as Patna Senior Superintendent of Police. He was also appointed officer on special duty on the Ayodhya dispute.

He has penned several books, the most famous being *Ayodhya Revisited*, which was also part of the final hearing on the *Ram Janmabhoomi* case.

‘U.S.-India ties will be strengthened, but expect tariff hikes’

Former Trump envoy to India says the new administration will push hard on Iran sanctions, China challenge; he says Trump appointees by and large will be furthering the strength of U.S.-India ties; the President-elect has indicated that he will impose tariffs of 10% to 20% on most countries, and this probably will include India; Juster emphasises that the two leaders have a good relationship

INTERVIEW

Kenneth Juster

Suhasini Haidar

With the inauguration of Donald Trump as the President of the United States for the second time just weeks away, New Delhi stepped up its outreach to the incoming administration with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri both spending the year-end week in Washington. In an exclusive interview, Mr. Trump’s last envoy to India (2017-2021), Kenneth Juster, spoke about what to expect from his next tenure in office. Excerpts:

Broadly, how do you think President Trump will approach India, given your experience of the ties during his previous tenure?

I think there is going to be a very strong U.S.-Indian relationship during the second term of the Trump presidency, and I base that on what happened during the first term. President Trump was the first U.S. President to label China as a strategic challenge... we also revived the Quad, which has continued to thrive under the Biden administration. We enhanced our defence cooperation significantly, signing three major foundational agreements, increasing the number of military exercises and having the first ever tri-services exercise. We increased energy exports to India... There’s a very strong relationship between the President and the Prime Minister, and the U.S. really provided very critical and important assistance to India when China came across the Line of Actual control into disputed territory in 2020.

What should one make of Trump nominees thus far?

I think the appointees by and large will be furthering the strength of the U.S.-India relationship... In addition, these advisers see China as the major strategic challenge that the United States faces. And in that sense, I think there is a certain strategic clarity between the United States and India as to what some of the challenges will be in the Indo-Pacific region.

Given Mr. Trump’s threats of the past on India being a “tariff abuser” and how India lost its GSP status for exporters, should India expect more of such shock therapy?

Look, the President has been clear that he believes India should lower tariffs and is too protectionist. I don’t think it’s correct to say that the GSP issue was a shock therapy. The President-elect has indicated that he will slap tariffs of 10% to 20% on most countries, and I think that would probably include India. But I also think that could be the beginning of a negotiation to open markets a bit and, from India’s perspective, to try to lock down the benefits of its largest trade partner, the United States, in both goods and services. And one should think expansively in terms of what other issues of concern, whether it be in technology, in energy, or elsewhere, where the two sides could do some horse trading and reach a broader trade and economic agreement.

The Trump administration strong-armed India on stopping all Iran oil imports. What would be the expectations from India in the next four years?

On Iran, the Trump administration had a maximum pressure campaign, which I think may well get reinstituted in this next term. India was treated like every other country, which meant [India] needed to zero out oil imports from Iran. And India complied with that.

Do you think a Trump administration will approach these DOJ investigations and indictments in the Adani case, now the Pannun case, and will it affect India-U.S. ties?

I would not expect that the Trump administration would seek to inject itself in these cases. I can’t foresee what the legal people at the Department of Justice will do.

But beyond that, I don’t see these cases having any substantial effect on the broader U.S.-India relationship.

What are the skills that you think Mr. Trump should be looking for in the next envoy to India?

The choice should be one that understands President Trump and how he operates, so that he or she can help deal with any statements that come out of Washington in terms of translating them effectively to the Indian government.

There is also some commentary on whether PM Modi will get an invitation to the Trump inaugural on January 20, as Chinese President Xi Jinping has. Your thoughts?

It’s not normally been the tradition to have foreign leaders come to an inauguration. Instead, it’s been representatives and ambassadors in Washington who attend. I don’t know what the thinking is within the administration, and I have not yet heard anything one way or the other in terms of an invitation to Prime Minister Modi. I would emphasise that the two leaders have a very good relationship.

(Full interview at https://newsth.live/Kennethjuster)

Modi announces a series of events to mark 75 years of Constitution

In his monthly *Mann ki Baat* radio address, PM says the Constitution is ‘our guiding light, our guide’, asks people to visit a special website named constitution75.com; says there has been an 80% reduction in the number of malaria cases, deaths

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his monthly radio address, *Mann Ki Baat*, on Sunday, said his government had commenced year-long activities to celebrate the completion of 75 years of the Constitution. He said it was a matter of great honour for the people of the country.

“The Constitution, handed over to us by our Constitution makers, has stood the test of time in every sense of the term. The Constitution is our guiding light, our guide,” he said, adding that it was on account of the Constitution that he was able to talk to the people.

“This year, on Constitution Day, the 26th of November, many activities have commenced that will go on for a year. A special website named constitution75.com has also been created to connect the citizens of the country with the legacy of the Constitution,” Mr. Modi said, asking people to visit the website, read the Preamble of the Constitution, and upload their videos. “You can read the Constitution in myriad languages; you can also ask questions pertaining to the Constitution,” he said.

All ears: BJP supporters listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s *Mann Ki Baat* radio address in Varanasi on Sunday. ANI

Mr. Modi announced that for the first time, the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) would be organised in India. “This summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation,” he said, adding that young creators were also joining the preparations for the summit.

He appreciated an effort in Paraguay by a citizen, Erica Huber, to promote Ayurveda. “At the Indian Embassy there, Erica Huber offers Ayurveda consultation. These days, a large number of local people are reaching out to her to get Ayurveda-based advice,” Mr. Modi said.

Speaking of the Fiji government’s efforts to promote Tamil, he said it’s a matter of great pride that Tamil is the oldest language in the world. “The number of people learning it is constantly rising in countries around the world. At the end of last month, a Tamil teaching programme was started in Fiji with the support of the Government of India. This is the first time in the past 80 years that trained Tamil teachers are teaching the language in Fiji,” he said.

Citing a report of the World Health Organization, he said there had been an 80% reduction in the number of malaria cases and deaths in India between 2015 and 2023. “This is no mean achievement. The most heartening thing is that this success has been achieved through everyone’s participation,” the Prime Minister said.

Talking about an effort in Kalahandi, Odisha, Mr. Modi said a Farmers Producer Organisation (FPO), Kisan Utpad Sangh, started using modern technology in farming, and at present, their business was worth crores, “Today, vegetables from Kalahandi are reaching other States, and the farmers there are now learning new techniques of potato and onion cultivation. Friends, this success of Kalahandi teaches us all that can be done with determination and collective effort,” Mr. Modi said, urging people to encourage and strengthen FPOs in their areas.

Amid BJP-Congress row, Manmohan Singh’s ashes immersed in the Yamuna

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Family members of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh immersed his ashes in the Yamuna here on Sunday following Sikh religious rituals. The war of words between the BJP and the Congress continued on Sunday too over a memorial to Dr. Singh. The BJP criticised the Gandhi family for its absence on the occasion on Sunday.

The family members collected Dr. Singh’s ashes from the Nigambodh Ghat, where he was cremated on Saturday, and took it to the banks of the Yamuna near the Majnu Ka Tila Gurdwara.

Dr. Singh’s wife Gursharan Kaur, and his daughters Upinder Singh, Daman Singh and Amrit Singh, along with relatives, were present during the ceremony.

Last rites: The ‘Asthi Visarjan’ ritual being performed for Manmohan Singh at the Yamuna Ghat in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

The family will hold ceremonies such as *akhand path, bhog, antim das* and *kirtan* at Dr. Singh’s Motilal Nehru Marg residence on January 1 and at the Rakab Ganj Gurdwara on January 3.

“We all will always remember Manmohan Singh*ji*’s service to the nation, his dedication and his simplicity,” the Congress said on social media while sharing pictures of the immersion.

BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa questioned the absence of the Gandhi family in the ceremony. “It’s a sad moment for all of us. However, it’s true that no one was there from the Gandhi family today [during the immersion of Dr. Singh’s ashes]...Today, when there was no camera, there was no one from the Congress,” Mr. Sirsa said.

Assam Chief Minister and BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Congress is trying to create a controversy.

‘Shivling’ beneath U.P. CM’s residence must be removed: Akhilesh

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said there was a ‘Shivling’ beneath Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s official residence in Lucknow. He called for its excavation.

“There is a Shivling under the Chief Minister’s residence in Lucknow. It should also be excavated,” Mr. Yadav told presspersons in Lucknow.

The statement, seen as a dig at Mr. Adityanath, came amid a rising political face-off over recent surveys sought in Uttar Pradesh, mostly around temples and mosques. Last week, a 250-ft-deep stepwell, dating back to the era of the 1857 revolt, was unearthed during a survey in Uttar Pradesh’s Sambhal. The stepwell was found after two bulldozers were involved in excavation at the site in the Laxman Ganj area of the town.

The SP and the Congress have continuously alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its supporters were using such surveys, aimed at creating division in society for political gains, to distract the masses from core issues, including unemployment and the agrarian crisis.

Akhilesh Yadav

‘Waiting for polls’

Mr. Yadav, while speaking to presspersons, said that the people of Uttar Pradesh wanted to overthrow the BJP government and were awaiting elections. “People are angry with the government on all counts, be it law and order, education, farmers’ issue, and women’s safety. The coming times in U.P. will be the phase of change,” he said.

Turnout of overseas Indians in Lok Sabha election low, says EC

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Overseas Indians showed great enthusiasm in registering as electors, with nearly 1.2 lakh enrolling on the voter list, but a minuscule number turned up to exercise their franchise in the Lok Sabha election this year.

Data released by the Election Commission show that as many as 1,19,374 registered as overseas electors in 2024, with the highest registrations of 89,839 in Kerala. In 2019, as many as 99,844 registered as overseas electors.

The commission said only 2,958 overseas electors flew down to India to participate in the largest democratic exercise in the world in 2024. Of these, an overwhelming 2,670 were from Kerala.

Several large States such as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu saw zero turnout of overseas electors.

Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s home State, saw only two out of 885 overseas electors casting their votes. Similar was the story in Maharashtra, where only 17 of the 5,097 NRI electors voted.

While there were 7,927 registered NRI electors in Andhra Pradesh, only 195 flew down to vote. In Assam, none of the 19 registered electors voted. Similarly, in Bihar none of the 89 registered NRI electors exercised their franchise. In Goa, none of its 84 voters cast their ballots.

While NRI voters is a generic term, the EC describes them as overseas electors.

The missing diaspora voter

Despite a 19.6% increase in registered NRI electors since the 2019 LS polls, their participation in the 2024 election was poor

- Registered overseas electors **1,19,374**
- Overseas electors who voted **2,958**
- Highest NRI voter turnout: Kerala (**2,670** voters)

- Some States with zero NRI voter turnout: Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Bihar and Goa

SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISION OF INDIA

Despite an increase of a little over 19,500 registered overseas electors since the 2019 election, their participation in the latest polls was poor.

Under the existing electoral law, registered NRI voters have to come to their respective Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies to vote. They have to show their passport as proof of their identity.

The commisison says that while eligible Indian citizens who enrol in electoral rolls are called electors, those who actually exercise their franchise are described as voters.

In August 2018, the 16th Lok Sabha passed a Bill to allow proxy voting rights to eligible overseas Indians. The Bill, however, could not be brought to the Rajya Sabha.

Remote vote proposal

In 2020, the EC proposed to the Union Law Ministry to extend the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) facility, so far available only to service voters, to eligible overseas Indian voters as well. It would require changes in the election rules. But the government has so far not taken a call on the issue.

The EC had then told the government that it had been receiving several representations from the Indian diaspora to facilitate voting through postal ballots.

The electors cited travel costs, compulsions of employment overseas, and education, among other things, as reasons for their inability to cast their votes in person, the commission said.

Centre gets 6.21 lakh applications under PM internship scheme

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Corporate Affairs Ministry said in a release on Sunday that the pilot scheme of the Prime Minister’s Internship Scheme received approximately 6.21 lakh applications against 1.27 lakh opportunities. “The selection process for internship is ongoing,” the Ministry said.

The internship scheme was announced in the previous Union Budget, and it aims to provide internship opportunities to one crore youth in the top 500 companies over five years. “Through this Scheme, youth will gain exposure to real-life business environment, across varied professions and employment opportunities,” the Centre said.

Financial aid

“The interns will be provided with financial assistance of ₹5,000 per month [for 12 months], of which ₹4,500 would be disbursed by the Union government, and ₹500 per month would be paid by the company from its CSR [corporate social responsibility] funds,” the Centre added.

The Corporate Affairs Ministry will also provide a one-time grant of ₹6,000 for incidentals to each intern, upon joining the place of internship.

KMML
The Kerala Minerals and Metals Ltd
(A Govt. of Kerala Undertaking) Sankaramangalam, Kollam-691 583
Phone: 0476-2651215 to 2651217, e-mail: md@kmml.com, URL: www.kmml.com

TENDER NOTICE

For more details, please visit E-Tendering Portal, https://etenders.kerala.gov.in or www.kmml.com

Sl No.	Tender ID	Items
1	2024_KMML_718010_1	For the supply of Shell and Tube Condensers/ Heat Exchangers
2	2024_KMML_717670_1	For the supply of Ladle Furnace-Resistance Heating 3 Zone

Chavara 27.12.2024 Sd/- Managing Director for The Kerala Minerals and Metals Ltd

INBRIEF

Navi Mumbai airport conducts first flight validation test

The Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) successfully conducted its first commercial flight validation test on Sunday in the presence of DGCA officials. An IndiGo A320 aircraft landed on Runway 08/26 at the NMIA. The aircraft was welcomed with the traditional water salute by two crash fire tenders. "The successful completion of the validation flight is a major milestone. We are now one step closer to operationalising the airport, prioritising safety at every step," said Arun Bansal, chief executive officer, Adani Airport Holdings Ltd.

Outrage over U.P. rail staff spraying water on passengers

A viral video, showing railway staff at Lucknow's Charbagh station spraying water on passengers – mostly women, children and elderly people – resting on platforms on a winter night, led to outrage across social media on Sunday. The incident, which allegedly took place on Christmas night, has been termed a "shame on humanity" by social media users, while the Opposition parties said it shows that Lucknow lacks public shelters or cheap lodging facilities to house the poor during the bitter cold of winter.

ISRO to sign off 2024 with space docking experiment mission today

The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle will place two satellites, Chaser and Target, into orbit; the two spacecraft will attempt docking in the first week of January; the exercise is expected to serve as a stepping stone to India's future space missions

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation is set to end the year with the launch of the PSLV C60/SpaDeX mission on Monday. The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle is scheduled to lift off at 9.58 p.m. from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

The space agency, for the first time, will be attempting the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX), which will demonstrate in-space docking using two small spacecraft.

According to the ISRO, SpaDeX is designed to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for spacecraft rendezvous, docking, and undocking using two small satellites. "SpaDeX will serve as a milestone in advancing India's capabilities in space docking, a critical technology for future space missions, including satellite servicing, space station operations, and interplanetary missions," it said. The demonstration of this technology is essential for futuristic missions such as sending an Indian astronaut on the moon, sample return from the moon, the building and operation of an Indian space station.

The PSLV-C60 will launch the two small spacecraft, Chaser and Target, also named SDX01 and SDX02, weighing about 220 kg each, into a 470-km circular orbit at a 55-degree inclination separately. The SDX02 spacecraft will be the first to separate 15 minutes after the launch followed by the SDX01 a few seconds later.

Incremental velocity

"The demonstrated precision of the PSLV vehicle will be utilised to give a small relative velocity between the Target and Chaser spacecraft at the time of separation from the launch vehicle. This incremental velocity will allow the Target spacecraft to build a 10-20 km inter-satellite separation with respect to the Chaser within a day. At this point, the relative velocity between the Target will be compensated using the propulsion system of the Target spacecraft," the ISRO said.

It added that at the end of this drift arrest manoeuvre, Target and Chaser will be in the same orbit with identical velocity but separated by about 20 km, known as Far Rendezvous. "With a similar strategy of introducing and then compensating for a small relative velocity between the two spacecraft, the Chaser will approach the Target with progressively reduced inter-satellite distances, ultimately leading to the docking of the two spacecraft," it added. The docking is expected to take place in the first week of January.

Twenty-four PS4-Orbital Experiment Module payloads will be also be flown onboard the PSLV-C60 SpaDeX mission.

Countdown begins: The launch vehicle being moved to the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. PTI

4 workers die after inhaling toxic gas at Gujarat plant

Press Trust of India
BHARUCH

Four workers died on Sunday after inhaling toxic fumes following gas leakage at a chemical plant in Dahej in Bharuch district of Gujarat, the police said.

The victims fell unconscious after inhaling the toxic fumes leaking from a pipe at a production unit of Gujarat Fluorochemicals Ltd. around 10 p.m. on Saturday, B.M. Patidar, inspector, Dahej police station, said. They were rushed to a private hospital in Bharuch.

Three of them died around 3 a.m. on Sunday, while another died at 6 a.m., the official said. The bodies were sent for a post-mortem examination and further probe was under way, the official said.

Jignesh Parmar, Deputy General Manager, GFL, Dahej, told presspersons that they will investigate the matter and a compensation of ₹25 lakh would be paid to the kin of each of the deceased workers. "The company and the management are saddened by the incident," he said.

M.P. govt. begins disposal of toxic waste from Union Carbide factory

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government has begun the process to dispose of 337 tonnes of toxic waste accumulated on the premises of Union Carbide India Ltd. in the State capital, Bhopal, 40 years after the disaster, senior officials aware of the developments said on Sunday.

The waste is expected to be moved to the Pithampur industrial area near Indore late on Sunday or Monday night.

Confirming the development to *The Hindu*, Bhopal gas tragedy relief and rehabilitation Department director Swatantra Kumar Singh said the packing and stacking of the waste material was currently under way at the Union Carbide factory site under the supervision of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board (MPPCB).

Once packed, the toxic and chemical waste will be dispatched to a Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility (TSDF) in Pithampur of Dhar district, Mr. Singh said, adding that the movement of the waste may begin late on Sunday or Monday night, depending on when it is completely packed.

Clean-up begins: Police personnel stationed at the gate of the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal on Sunday. A.M.FARUQUI

"We have arranged for 12 specially designed airtight containers for the waste and currently the waste is being packed in airtight bags and loaded onto the containers. Once done, the containers will be loaded in 12 trucks and dispatched to Pithampur," he said. "We cannot confirm the exact time when it will be moved due to security reasons and the waste is also being packed with necessary precautions so we cannot rush it. It could be either Sunday or Monday night," he said, adding that specially trained workers have been called in to pack and load the waste.

Mr. Singh also said that a green corridor of about 250 kilometres would be prepared for the movement of the waste. He said the workers were staying on the factory campus and all arrangements had been made for them.

"A particular team of workers only does a 30-45 minute shift instead of a regular 8-9 hour shift as longer exposure to the waste may be harmful for them," he added.

Meanwhile, security personnel have been deployed in large numbers in and around the UCIL premises in Bhopal and movement of transport vehicles has been witnessed since Saturday.

Earlier on December 3, the Madhya Pradesh High Court had set a four-week deadline for the authorities for the disposal of the toxic waste.

Referring to the High Court's directions, Mr. Singh on December 27 wrote to multiple authorities, including the Pithampur Industrial Waste Management Pvt. Ltd. that has been tasked with the packing, loading, transporting and incinerating the waste material, to start the disposal process.

After weeks on the run, tiger Zeenat tranquillised and caged in Bengal

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

A female tiger which had kept forest officials of three States on their toes for weeks was finally captured on Sunday after being tranquillised in Bankura district of West Bengal.

Zeenat, the three-year-old tiger, had run away from the Similipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha earlier this month. It stayed in Jharkhand for a few days before entering West Bengal.

"Preliminary health observation of the tiger will be done in some veterinary hospital where veterinary hospital facilities are present," Debal Roy, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and Chief Wildlife Warden, told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Roy said the issue of releasing the tiger back into the wild would be decided after the health of the animal is ascertained.

Big relief

Efforts to tranquillise the animal had been going on for the past few days. On Saturday, one such attempt went in vain.

The tranquillising and caging of the animal have come as a big relief not only for forest officials but also for people residing in the Jangalmahal area of West Bengal.

For the past several days, forest officials had put up nylon nets in the habitation where the tiger was being tracked.

Zeenat was relocated to the Similipal Tiger Reserve from Tadoba in Maharashtra to bolster the tiger population in Odisha. She has a radio collar on her neck which helped forest officials track her location.

The tiger had been changing her location every few days. She entered West Bengal from Jharkhand on December 19.

She was first tracked in Jhargram district, and then she travelled to the Bandwan area of Purulia district on Thursday. She moved to Purulia's Dangardi forests in Manbazar for only a day. She was in Purulia's Bandwan for over five days.

The tiger reportedly killed over three domestic goats and the carcasses were found in the nearby jungles.

The fragmented forest patches of Purulia, Jhargram, and Bankura, called the Jangalmahal region, does not have any tiger population. In June 2018, a tiger which had strayed into the region was killed by the local people despite attempts by the forest officials to rescue the animal.

Hide-and-seek ends: Forest officials carry the tiger in Bankura of West Bengal on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

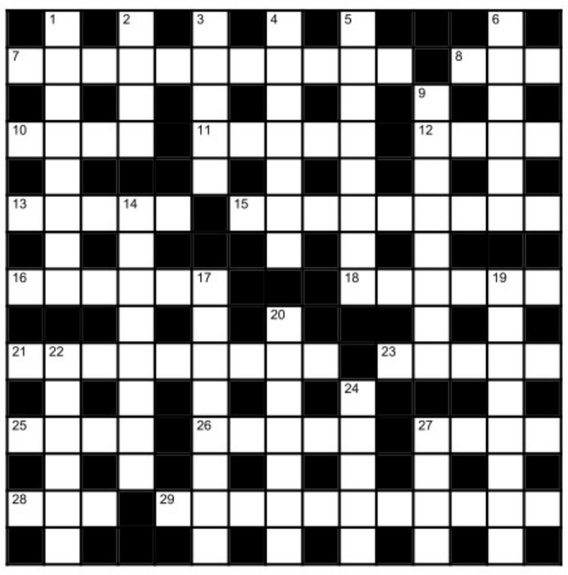
Whether or not to release the tiger back into the wild will be decided after the health of the animal is ascertained, says a forest official

TH CROSSWORD + 14369

(set by Hypatia)

To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ *https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn*

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

7 Probe worker posing as influencer (5,6)
8 Beauty spot basically in skin, perhaps acne (3)
10 Took advantages of cues read periodically (4)
11 GATE, NEET or IIT-JEE's portions (5)
12 Circulating attaché's proposal (4)
13 Tiny part appeared ordinary (5)
15 Spooner's chief gardener's a valuable employee (9)
16 Small crew controls royal jet (6)
18 Santa's reindeer pranced freely dropping presents at entrance (6)
21 Dead jail bird tipped to smuggle drugs at first (9)
23 Oddly selected UK guards in new year (5)
25 Prejudice in British civil service (4)
26 Jerk tackles work subject (5)
27 Colony resident hosting posh relative (4)
28 Embarrassed in fling (3)
29 Stymie attack behind Putin (3,2,3,3)

Down

1 Fixed fan during study time (8)
2 Initially found enemies using daggers in rivalry (4)
3 Sailor had to sink (5)
4 Diary of sweetheart, a student smoking pot (7)
5 Gave up degree for writing as planned (8)
6 Non-commercial tool covering that woman's domain (6)
9 Encounter a problem against husband at work (3,1,4)
14 Training in duty overcoming hesitation (8)
17 Sex change at the onset of spring makes one peak (8)
19 Player Liren entertained by joke about finishing (6,2)
20 Paradise lost without a hope? Just the opposite! (7)
22 State Modi's happy to govern (6)
24 Critical crop planted in area regularly (5)
27 Cross monkey climbing above top (4)

SUDOKU

4	1			9	6	2	5	
		6			3			
2					4			
1				5				
	5	2	3		8	1	7	
				1				2
			4					8
			2			3		
	2	3	8	6			1	5

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

No.SS6385 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

Solution to previous puzzle

A	S	P			M	D	S	
B	L	A	N	K	E	T	S	
T	O	A	P	M	P	O		
C	H	E	W	R	E	A	S	O
O			L	R	R	E		
N	U	R	S	E	S	K	N	I
G	U			L	E	M		
H	I	G	H	P	R	I	E	S
	G	R	N			N	K	
G	R	E	E	T	I	N	G	L
A	S	N	W	O			L	
P	R	O	T	E	C	T	I	O
E	I	E	N	G	E	T		
E	L	B	O	W	S	E	L	E
Y	N	S			D	K	N	

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

7	9	1	6	3	8	2	4	5
2	4	5	9	1	7	6	8	3
3	6	8	4	2	5	7	1	9
8	5	7	2	4	9	1	3	6
1	2	9	3	8	6	4	5	7
4	3	6	7	5	1	9	2	8
9	1	3	5	6	4	8	7	2
5	7	4	8	9	2	3	6	1
6	8	2	1	7	3	5	9	4

FAITH

Hanuman, doyen of dharma

Hanuman is synonymous with both intelligence and adherence to dharmic principles, said Damal S. Ramakrishnan in a discourse.

His restraint upon reaching Lanka is one example of his intelligence. Telling himself not to ruin the mission of searching for Sita, Hanuman expertly gauged the alertness of the rakshasas guarding the city. He decided to wait patiently and begin his search late at night. To this end, he also reduced his size, making himself as small as possible, while still remaining true to his form (ape). When he began to search for Sita, Hanuman was awestruck by the opulence, grandeur and sheer richness of the city, but did not tarry in any manner. When he entered Ravana's abode, he noticed the splendorous pushpak vimana. His eyes noted a number of men, women and couples in various postures of sleep, after a night of merrymaking.

He also saw Ravana, spread splendidly across the bed and was impressed with the sheer strength of his muscle power. He noticed Mandodari but could not find any trace of Sita. Exploring every part of the women's apartments, he was overcome by misgivings at his conduct. Valmiki says Hanuman was worried whether he was not guilty of transgression against dharma, by looking at other womenfolk while they were sleeping. However, he saw the logic of his action and realised he had done no wrong: where else would one search for a woman held hostage if not in women's quarters? "It is with a pure mind that I searched these quarters," Hanuman said and chanting Rama nama, he proceeded to the forest of Ashoka trees. And there he beheld Sita, looking distraught.

In 2024, Small was Beautiful

MARKETMUSINGS

Sumedha Shankar
NEW DELHI

Dalal Street minnows stole the show in 2024, giving handsome returns to investors, helped by a largely optimistic trend in the stock market and impressive retail investors' participation.

Analysts attributed the positive trend in the equity markets, where the benchmark indices shattered many records this year, to robust domestic liquidity, strong fundamentals of the Indian economy, and policy continuity. Market experts are optimistic about midcap and smallcap stocks for the next year, driven by factors like strong domestic consumption and government infrastructure spending.

Till December 23 this year, the BSE smallcap gauge has jumped 12,144.15 points or 28.45%, while the midcap index surged 9,435.09 points or 25.61%. In contrast, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex has soared 6,299.91 points or 8.72% .

To put that in context, the BSE Sensex had jumped 11,399.52 points or 18.73% in 2023, while the BSE smallcap gauge had rallied 47.52% and the midcap index climbed 11,524.72 points or 45.52%.

"Smallcap and midcap indices outperformed in 2024 due to sectoral growth, policy support, and investor interest. Key sectors like real estate, infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy, heavily represented in these indices, benefited from government initiatives and favourable market conditions," said Palka Arora Chopra, director at Master Capital Services Ltd.

Local interest

Increased interest from domestic investors seeking higher returns and the valuation catch-up of smallcap and midcap stocks after prior underperformance also played a key role.

The midcap and smallcap segments tend to outshine their larger counterparts in a bull rally in the market, experts said.

The BSE smallcap gauge hit its lifetime high of 57,827.69 on December 12 this year, while the midcap index surged to a record 49,701.15 on September 24. The blue-chip peer Sensex reached its all-time high of 85,978.25 on September 27.

Liquidity driven

"Domestic liquidity has been a major driver behind the outperformance of the midcap and smallcap segments. Record SIP inflows, predominantly directed towards midcap and smallcap funds, have played a significant role in this trend," said Sunil Nyati, managing director, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

According to analysts, smaller stocks are generally bought by local investors, while overseas investors focus on blue-chips or large firms.

The midcap index tracks companies with a market value that is on average one-fifth of blue-chips, while smallcap firms are almost a tenth of that universe.

The BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty have faced heavy corrections in recent months after a record-breaking rally due to rich valuations.

Benchmarks lag

"Excluding the final quarter of 2024, the Indian equity market delivered strong performance, with investors reaping significant returns in several midcap and smallcap stocks. However, the benchmark indices, Nifty and Sensex, lagged behind global markets, particularly the U.S., primarily due to persistent aggressive selling by FIIs," Nyati said.

"The outlook for midcap and smallcap stocks in 2025 remains promising, but the rally is unlikely to be broad-based. Investors will need to adopt a more selective approach, as valuations in many areas have become stretched, and growth momentum appears to be lacking in certain sectors," Mr. Nyati reckoned.

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.

Over three years, health insurance claims rise 30%

The most common conditions leading to claims include fever (seasonal diseases), gastritis, heart disease, diabetes and cancer; the share of claims of younger adults has been higher

HEALTH COVER

Team Policybazaar

Seasonal and chronic conditions are driving up health insurance claims. The most common conditions leading to claims include fever (seasonal diseases), gastritis, heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Seasonal diseases like fever typically drive a surge in claims during specific months, particularly during monsoon and winter. Meanwhile, conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer reflect long-term health trends, indicating increasing prevalence of chronic diseases among Indians.

Rapid rise in claims

The 30% rise in average payouts over three years suggests healthcare costs are rising, and policyholders are claiming higher amounts for medical treatments. This trend also indicates insurance is becoming a more essential tool for managing medical expenses as medical inflation outpaces general inflation.

Maharashtra, Delhi

States like Maharashtra and Delhi report higher claim payouts despite having a similar proportion of total claims. This can be due to the higher cost of healthcare in urban centers and more advanced medical facilities available.

Claims frequency

Clam frequency has steadily increased over the last three years. It means more policyholders are utilising health insurance benefits. This could be due to improved access to healthcare services, a greater awareness of health insurance coverage, and a proactive approach to managing personal health.

Young adult claims up

The higher share of claims from younger adults (18-35) reflects a combination of seasonal illnesses (fever, viral infections) and rising claims for chronic conditions like diabetes, which are increasingly diagnosed at younger ages. This trend underscores the need to buy health insurance when young and healthy. The gender distribution (86% male) is typical of health insurance claims, as men tend to file claims more frequently, possibly due to a higher penetration of insurance among males.

Motor insurance

The leading causes of motor insurance claims are primarily accidents, theft, and damage from natural events. The prevalence of accidents and total loss claims reflects the importance of having robust motor insurance to protect against collisions and theft

Claim amount basis

The higher claim amounts for SUVs reflect their greater value and more complex repair costs compared to smaller vehicles like hatchbacks. The higher claim volumes from hatchbacks are due to their higher market share in the overall vehicle population.

Monsoon claim surge

There is a notable spike in motor insurance claims during the monsoon season, with a 40% rise in claims during rainy months in cities which are more prone to heavy rains. Factors like heavy rains, flooding and slippery road conditions contribute to higher total loss claims, higher accident rates and damage to vehicles, especially in regions prone to monsoon weather.

Popularity of add-ons

Policyholders are increasingly choosing add-ons like zero depreciation, engine protectors, and cost of consumables as part of motor insurance plans for their car as old as up to 10 years. This indicates a growing trend towards enhanced protection and a desire for comprehensive coverage in the event of a claim.

South and Delhi-NCR

Regions such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh report higher total loss motor claims due to cyclones, while States like Delhi NCR, Maharasthra experience more accidental claims.

Heart issues

Heart disease and natural causes remain the most prevalent reasons for term insurance claims, which is consistent with the overall ageing population and the growing awareness of health risks. COVID-19 claims also reflect the impact of the pandemic on life insurance needs even after three years.

Male policyholders

The majority of term insurance claims are made by male policyholders (90-92%). This is mainly due to the high penetration of term insurance among males. Men also generally have higher mortality rates and may be more likely to take term life cover resulting in a higher percentage of claims from them.

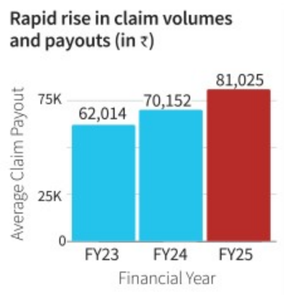
Regions with higher urban population leading in claims. The top regions for term insurance claims include Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, and Gujarat. These areas see higher claim volumes due to a combination of larger populations and greater awareness of the importance of life insurance. Regions with higher urban populations and greater access to financial services see more claims because policyholders are more likely to engage with life insurance products.

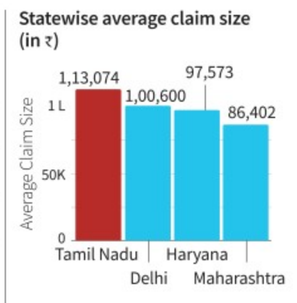
Riders gain popularity

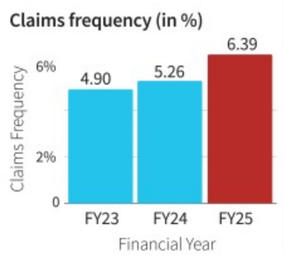
Approximately 35-40% of term insurance policyholders are opting for riders like critical illness and accidental death benefits, indicating a growing desire for comprehensive protection, particularly among those concerned about critical illnesses or accidents.

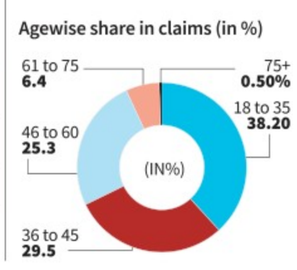
Rising costs

Insurance is becoming a more essential tool for managing medical expenses as medical inflation outpaces general inflation









Car: Segment wise claim volume share and claim amount range

Vehicle Type	Claim Volume Share	Claim Amount Range (₹)
Hatchback	54%	20,000 - 25,000
Sedan	21%	25,000 - 30,000
SUV	26%	30,000 - 35,000

The frequency of claims has steadily increased over the last three years. It means that more policyholders are utilizing their health insurance benefits.

> The prevalence of accidents and total loss claims reflects the importance of having robust motor insurance to protect against both collisions and theft

> There is a notable spike in motor insurance claims during monsoon season, with a 40% rise in claims during rainy months in cities more prone to heavy rains

The alpha arithmetic

THINKINVESTOR

Given the market behaviour in recent years, portfolio managers must continually move from one sector to another (sector rotation) to consistently generate positive alpha

Venkatesh Bangaruswamy

As investors, we want to earn above-average returns. In the context of mutual fund investments, above-average return means earning greater than a fund's benchmark return. This excess return is referred to as alpha. Active funds strive to generate positive alpha. Small wonder that investors typically prefer active over passive funds. Here, we discuss the arithmetic of alpha returns.

Zero-sum game?

Market, here, refers to the style benchmark of a fund. So, if you invest in a large-cap style fund, market in relation to the fund refers to all large-cap stocks. Likewise, if you were to invest in a mid-cap fund, market refers to all mid-cap stocks.

Now, consider the NSE 100 index, the large-cap style benchmark. The average return in relation to large-cap stocks would be the NSE 100 Index. So, we can state active large-cap funds that generate positive alpha earn above-average returns. But that means some other active large-cap funds must generate below-average returns. How else can the average returns of all these funds be equal to the NSE 100 Index? In other words, alpha must be a zero-sum game.

That is, the sum of positive alpha returns must equal the sum of negative-alpha returns.

Note, there many other funds like diversified and solution-oriented funds that will invest in large-cap stocks. Also, mid-cap funds may invest in large-cap stocks. Therefore, proving that alpha is a zero-sum game is easier said than done.

Nevertheless, the above argument has some implication on your investment decision. If alpha were a zero-sum game, some portfolio managers will win, and some others will have to lose. And, if portfolio managers are skillful, it is highly unlikely the same portfolio managers will always win while some others will always lose. In other words, portfolio managers may be skillful, yet a fund's annual return can swing between positive and negative alpha between one year and the next.

Conclusion

Given the market behaviour in recent years, portfolio managers must continually move from one sector to another (sector rotation) to consistently generate positive alpha. But more the active decisions (active bets), greater the active risk (likelihood of negative alpha).

Then, there is the alpha fade rate – the rate at which an alpha strategy fades (no longer generates alpha) is faster than the rate at which newer strategies can be developed. You must be mindful of these factors when you invest in active funds.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

Personal Loans

Rates and Charges — Loan amount 5 lakh, Tenure 5 years — Loan amount 1 lakh, Tenure 5 years — (% of loan amount)

Name of Lender	Interest Rate (%)	EMI (Rs)	EMI (Rs)	Processing fee
HDFC Bank	10.85-24.00	10,834-14,384	2,167-2,877	Up to Rs 6,500
Tata Capital	11.99 onwards	11,120 onwards	2,224 onwards	Up to 5.5%
State Bank of India	11.45-14.85	10,984-11,856	2,197-2,371	NIL
ICICI Bank	10.85-16.25	10,834-12,226	2,167-2,445	Up to 2%
Bank of Baroda	11.05-18.75	10,884-12,902	2,177-2,580	Up to 2% (Maximum Rs 10,000)
Axis Bank	11.00 onwards	10,871 onwards	2,174 onwards	Up to 2%
Kotak Mahindra Bank	10.99-16.00	10,869-12,159	2,174-2,432	Up to 5%
Bank of India	10.85-16.10	10,834-12,186	2,167-2,437	Up to 1% (Min Rs 250 and Max Rs 10,000)
Canara Bank	10.95-16.40	10,859-12,266	2,172-2,453	0.25% (Maximum Rs 5,000)
Punjab National Bank	11.40-17.95	10,971-12,683	2,194-2,537	Up to 1%
HSBC Bank	10.15-16.00	10,660-12,159	2,132-2,432	Up to 2%
Federal Bank	11.49-14.49	10,994-11,762	2,199-2,352	Up to 3%
Union Bank of India	11.35-15.45	10,959-12,013	2,192-2,403	Up to 1% (Maximum Rs 7,500)
Bajaj Finserv	10.00-31.00	10,624-16,485	2,125-3,297	Up to 3.93%
Punjab & Sind Bank	11.25-14.00	10,934-11,634	2,187-2,327	0.50%-1%
South Indian Bank	12.85-20.60	11,338-13,414	2,268-2,683	Up to 2%
UCO Bank	12.45-12.85	11,236-11,338	2,247-2,268	Up to 1% (Minimum Rs 750)
IDFC First Bank	10.99 onwards	10,869 onwards	2,174 onwards	2%
Bank of Maharashtra	10.00-12.80	10,624-11,325	2,125-2,265	1% (Rs 1,000-Rs 10,000)
Karnataka Bank	13.68	11,551	2,310	Up to 2% (Min. Rs 2,500 & Max. Rs 8,500)
IndusInd Bank	10.49 onwards	10,744 onwards	2,149 onwards	Up to 3.5%

Car Loans

Rates and Charges — Loan amount 5 lakh, Tenure 5 years — (% of loan amount)

Name of Lender	Interest Rate (%)	EMI (Rs)	Processing fee
Union Bank of India	8.70 - 10.45	10,307 - 10,735	NIL
Punjab National Bank	8.75 - 10.60	10,319 - 10,772	Up to 0.25% (Rs. 1,000 - Rs. 1,500)
Bank of Baroda	9.00 - 12.70	10,379 - 11,300	Up to Rs 750
Canara Bank	8.70 - 12.70	10,307 - 11,300	NIL
UCO Bank	8.45 - 10.55	10,246 - 10,759	NIL
State Bank of India	9.10-10.15	10,403-10,660	NIL
Bank of Maharashtra*	8.70 - 13.00	10,307 - 11,377	NIL
Indian Overseas Bank**	8.85 - 12.00	10,343 - 11,122	0.50% (Rs 500 - Rs 5,000)
ICICI Bank	9.10 onwards	10,403 onwards	Up to 2%
HDFC Bank	9.20 onwards	10,428 onwards	Up to 1% (Rs 3,500 - Rs 9,000)
Karnataka Bank	9.13-11.61	10,411 - 11,024	0.60% (Rs 3,000 - Rs 11,000)
Federal Bank	8.85 onwards	10,343 onwards	Rs 2,000 - Rs 4,500
Punjab and Sind Bank***	8.85 - 10.25	10,343 - 10,685	0.25% (Rs 1,000-Rs 15,000)
South Indian Bank	8.75 onwards	10,319 onwards	0.75% (Max: Rs 10,000)
IDFC First Bank	9.99 onwards	10,621 onwards	Up to Rs 10,000
City Union Bank	10.00-11.80	10,624-11,072	1.25% (Min: Rs 1,000)

*0.25% interest rate concession for existing housing loan borrowers and corporate salary account holders
**0.50% interest rate concession to borrowers with credit scores of 800 and above. Interest rate concession of 0.25% to borrowers having credit scores of 750-799.
***Concession of up to 50% on processing fee for PSB Apna Vahan Sugam.

Rates and charges as on December 26 — **Source: Paisabazaar.com**

DAMASCUS

Nearly 300 arrested in crackdown on Assad loyalists in Syria: monitor

REUTERS

Syria's new authorities have arrested nearly 300 people, including informants, pro-regime fighters and former soldiers, in a crackdown on loyalists to ousted former president Bashar al-Assad, a monitor said. The militants led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group have intensified efforts to consolidate control in Syria. AFP

TBILISI

Georgia's new President is sworn in amid political showdown

AFP

Georgia inaugurated Mikhail Kavelashvili, a far-right governing party loyalist, as President, escalating a political showdown moments after his pro-EU predecessor Salome Zurabishvili declared herself the "only legitimate President". The move ratchets up a long political crisis that has seen huge pro-EU demonstrations. AFP

SEOUL

N. Korea moots 'toughest' strategy to counter U.S. at party meeting

REUTERS

North Korea will launch its "toughest" ever strategy to counter the United States, state media said on Sunday, reporting on a key year-end party meeting overseen by leader Kim Jong-un. The nuclear-armed state held a five-day party meeting last week as part of a drive to chart the country's course for 2025. AFP

KABUL

Taliban leader bans windows overlooking women's areas

AFP

The Taliban's supreme leader issued an order banning construction of windows in residential buildings that overlook areas used by Afghan women and saying that existing ones should be blocked. "Seeing women working in kitchens, in courtyards or collecting water from wells can lead to obscene acts," a statement read. AFP

Russia tried to 'hush up' the shooting of airliner, says Azerbaijan President

'For the first three days, we heard nothing from Russia except delirious versions,' says Ilham Aliyev; he adds that the incident may have been unintentional, but it still happened, taking 38 lives of the 67 on board; an investigation is under way

Associated Press

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev said on Sunday that the Azerbaijani airliner that crashed last week was shot down by Russia, albeit unintentionally, and criticised Moscow for trying to "hush up" the issue for days.

"We can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia. (...) We are not saying that it was done intentionally, but it was done," he told Azerbaijani state television.

Mr. Aliyev said that the airliner, which crashed on Wednesday in Kazakhstan, was hit by fire from the ground over Russia and "rendered uncontrollable by electronic warfare." Mr. Aliyev accused Russia of trying to "hush up" the issue for several days, saying he was "upset and surprised" by versions of events put forward by Russian officials.

Collateral victims: People mourn during a funeral of the crew members of the Azerbaijan Airlines in Baku on Sunday. AP

"Unfortunately, for the first three days we heard nothing from Russia except delirious versions," he said. The crash killed 38 of 67 people on board.

The Kremlin said that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, where the plane attempted to land, to deflect a Ukrainian drone strike.

Three demands

Mr. Aliyev said Azerbaijan made three demands to Russia in connection with the crash.

"First, the Russian side must apologise to Azerbaijan. Second, it must admit its guilt. Third, punish the guilty, bring them to criminal responsibility and pay compensation to the Azerbaijani state, the injured passengers and crew members," he said.

Mr. Aliyev noted that the first demand was "already fulfilled" when Russian President Vladimir Putin apologised to him on Saturday.

Mr. Putin called the crash a "tragic incident" though stopped short of acknowledging Moscow's responsibility. He said that an investigation was ongoing, and that "the final version (of events) will be known after the black boxes are opened."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Sunday that Mr. Putin had spoken to Mr. Aliyev over the phone again, but did not provide details.

Israeli air strike near Syrian capital kills 11: war monitor

Associated Press
BEIRUT

An Israeli air strike on the outskirts of Damascus on Sunday killed 11 persons, according to a war monitor, as Israel continues to target Syrian weapons and military infrastructure even after the ouster of former President Bashar al-Assad.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the air strike targeted a weapons depot that belonged to Mr. Assad's forces near the industrial town of Adra, northeast of the capital. The observatory said at least 11 persons, mostly civilians, were killed.

Beirut-based pan-Arab Al-Mayadeen TV also reported the air strike but put the death toll at six. The Israeli military did not comment on the air strike.

Defaced posters of Bashar al-Assad and his father Hafez al-Assad, hang at a military base at Mount Qasioun in Damascus. REUTERS

Israel, which has launched hundreds of air strikes over Syria since the country's uprising turned-civil war broke out in 2011, rarely acknowledges them.

Syrian insurgents who ousted Mr. Assad in a lightning offensive in early December have demanded that Israel cease its airstrikes.

Elsewhere, Turkish-backed Syrian rebels attacked near the strategic northern border town of Kobani, which is under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, following weeks-long clashes.

Minority body in Bangladesh seeks release of Hindu monk

Press Trust of India
DHAKA

A minority group in Bangladesh on Sunday called for the "immediate release" of Chinmoy Krishna Das, asserting that the case against the arrested Hindu monk is "false" and "harassing".

Das, a former ISKCON leader, was arrested in Dhaka on November 25. A court in Chattogram sent him to jail, rejecting his bail petition as he was accused of a sedition charge for allegedly disrespecting the country's flag. The hearing in the case will be held on January 2, 2025.

The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCOP) released a statement demanding his immediate release, the *Prothom Alo* news portal reported.

Always in favour of H1-B visas, says Trump as he sides with Musk on work permit row

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

Donald Trump weighed in on Saturday in a bitter debate dividing his traditional supporters and tech barons like Elon Musk, saying that he backs a special visa programme that helps highly skilled workers enter the country.

"I've always liked the (H1-B) visas, I have always been in favour of the visas, that's why we have them" at Trump-owned facilities, the president-elect told the *New York Post* in his first public comments on the matter since it flared up this week.

An angry back-and-forth, largely between Silicon Valley's Mr. Musk and traditional anti-immigration Trump backers, has erupted in fiery fashion,

Donald Trump

with Mr. Musk even vowing to "go to war" over the issue.

Poll plank

Mr. Trump's insistent calls for sharp curbs on immigration were central to his election victory in November over President Joe Biden. Mr. Trump has vowed to deport all undocumented immigrants and limit legal immigration.

But tech entrepreneurs like Tesla's Mr. Musk – as well as Vivek Ramaswamy, who is set to join Mr. Musk in co-chairing a government cost-cutting panel – say the U.S. produces too few highly skilled graduates, and they fervently champion the H1-B programme.

Mr. Musk, who migrated from South Africa on an H1-B, posted on Thursday on his X platform that luring elite engineering talent from abroad was "essential for America."

Adding acrimony to the debate was a post from Mr. Ramaswamy, the son of immigrants from India, who deplored an "American culture" that he said venerates mediocrity, adding that the U.S. risks having "our asses handed to us by China."

Year-end event to announce the 'burying' of 1972 constitution: Bangladesh students group

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Delaying the move offers Hasina's supporters a chance to question the uprising, says group

On the last day of the year, the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement of Bangladesh and other constituents of the July-August political uprising in the country will launch a 'July proclamation' that will "bury the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh", the conveners of the Anti Discrimination Students Movement announced on Sunday.

Addressing a press conference in Dhaka, the group's convener, Hasnat Abdullah, said the proclamation should have been released earlier and that the delay in announcing it has offered Sheikh Hasina and her supporters a chance to question the uprising.

The announcement is a significant development in the turbulent year in which Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government was overthrown in a movement that was led by the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement. "At 3 p.m. on December 31, we will declare the proclamation of July revolution. This will be the announcement of the Bangladesh's next goals, dreams and intentions. The declaration of December 31 at the Shahid Minar will be a legal recognition of the July revolution. We want the *Mujib-badi* (Mujib-era) constitution to be buried," Hasnat Abdullah said.

A draft of the 'July proclamation' that was shared on the occasion by the organisers held the constitution responsible for multiple problems that the country faced in recent years, including the strong arm rule by Ms. Hasina.

"We resolve that, we need a political settlement altering the '72 and 1/11 Settlements, which will pave the way for new democratic republic," the draft document stated. It further said, "We want reform or annulment of '72 constitution as it has sustained fascism in Bangladesh. The Interim Government, duly constituted, will be entrusted with reforms of the institutions and constitution."

THE HINDU GROUP

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IN A HURRY!

Bumrah quickest Indian to 200 Test wickets by balls bowled

AFP

Jasprit Bumrah while dismissing Travis Head on Sunday with his 8484th legal delivery, not only became the fastest Indian pacer to reach 200 Test wickets but also the fastest in terms of balls bowled. He beat the record of fellow-pacer Mohammed Shami, who reached the same milestone after bowling 9896 deliveries.

TEAM MAN

Labuschagne all praise for skipper Cummins for the revival

AFP

Marnus Labuschagne lauded skipper Pat Cummins after their 57-run seventh-wicket stand revived the host's second innings on Sunday. "Pat was amazing. He took the game on. He finds a way when the team needs him to scrap. I told him that I will take on Bumrah and we kind of stuck to that process"

REWARD BECKONS

Arshdeep and Smriti shortlisted for top ICC honours

GETTY IMAGES & VIJAY SONEJI

Pacer Arshdeep Singh and opener Smriti Mandhana have nominated for the ICC Men's and Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year awards respectively. Arshdeep emerged as the joint highest wicket-taker in India's T20 World Cup triumph, while Smriti has had a stellar year in international cricket.

JOB DONE

Rabada and Jansen's stand seals South Africa's WTC final spot

GETTY IMAGES

Kagiso Rabada (31) and Marco Jansen (16)'s unbeaten partnership of 51 off 50 balls saw South Africa edge Pakistan by two wickets in the first Test at Centurion and book a place in next year's World Test Championship final. **The scores**: Pakistan 211 & 237 lost to South Africa 301 & 150/8 in 39.3 overs (Bavuma 40, Abbas 6/54).

Aussie resistance outweighs Bumrah's mastery at MCG

The India speedster rocks the middle-order with a fiery spell before the host huffs and puffs to 228 for nine — 333 runs in the green; Labuschagne's 70 and a 55-run unbroken last-wicket stand between Lyon and Boland frustrate the visitor

INDIA IN AUS

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
MELBOURNE

A genius, high on speed and tempered with sense, largely owned a Sunday under Melbourne's deep blue skies. Jasprit Bumrah's inroads into Australia's second innings and the host's gritty lower-order resistance left the fourth Test poised on the razor's edge.

At close on the fourth day, Australia posted 228 for nine in its second innings and has an overall lead of 333. The last-wicket pair of Nathan Lyon and Scott Boland resisted all that the visitors flung at them and frustrated Rohit Sharma's men.

Fine margins: India tried its best to restrict Australia but Lyon and Boland kept on swelling the lead. AFP

Probing away

After India finished its first innings at 369 in the morning with centurion Nitish Kumar (114) being the last man to be dismissed, Australia had the task of converting the 105-run lead into a challenging target. Bumrah, though, had other ideas and relentlessly probed around the stumps.

Sam Konstas gave the charge, played and missed, while Usman Khawaja dug in. Bumrah castled Konstas and the Melbourne Cricket Ground came alive.

The debutant retreated and even as Khawaja essayed some pulls, the latter had to grapple with Mohammed Siraj.

The speedster got one to dart in and as the stumps were pegged back, Siraj gesticulated to the crowd to stay quiet. Obviously the reflexive booing that has greeted him Down Under, has rankled the speedster.

In the second session, Australia had to both stabilise and accelerate, and with Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith at the crease, there was hope. The former picked fours off Bumrah and Siraj. Rohit pressed Nitish into service and the crowd acknowledged the latest star with a roar. But it was Siraj, who broke through as he forced Smith to go searching outside the off-stump.

Once Smith left, Rohit smartly called Bumrah for another spell. This was a moment tailor-made for a great player to impose his will, and the spearhead delivered. Travis Head, cramped by Bumrah's angle, tried to force one towards the on-side and found Nitish waiting. In the same over, a tentative Mitchell Marsh attempted to ride the extra bounce and ended up feathering one to Rishabh Pant.

In his next over, Bumrah scythed through Alex Carey's stumps.

This was fast bowling of extreme menace and enormous merit. And the torrid spell read 3-1-4-3 while Australia gasped at 91 for six.

Dropped

Meanwhile Labuschagne motored on. Dropped on 46 by Yashasvi Jaiswal off Akash Deep, the batter got to his fifty, and with Pat Cummins, stretched Australia to 135 for six at tea.

In the last session, Labuschagne (70) fell to Siraj and when Mitchell Starc sought a risky two, he was left stranded by Pant's throw at the non-striker's stumps. Skipper Cummins, ever the thorn in India's flesh, hung in for a vital 41 till Ravindra Jadeja drew an edge.

The final pair of Lyon and Boland doggedly resisted through a 55-run unfinished partnership. Bumrah even 'scalped' Lyon with a no-ball in the day's last over before sheepishly realising the over-stepping bit.

Monday will be about agony or ecstasy, the Indians would hope for the second part.

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA — 1ST INNINGS
474 in 122.4 overs

INDIA — 1ST INNINGS
Yashasvi Jaiswal run out 82 *(118b, 11x4, 1x6)*, Rohit Sharma c Boland b Cummins 3 *(5b)*, K.L. Rahul b Cummins 24 *(42b, 3x4)*, Virat Kohli c Carey b Boland 36 *(86b, 4x4)*, Akash Deep c Lyon b Boland 0 *(13b)*, Rishabh Pant c Lyon b Boland 28 *(37b, 3x4)*, Ravindra Jadeja lbw b Lyon 17 *(51b, 3x4)*, Nitish Kumar c Starc b Lyon 114 *(189b, 11x4, 1x6)*, Washington Sundar c Smith b Lyon 50 *(162b, 1x4)*, Jasprit Bumrah c Khawaja b Cummins 0 *(3b)*, Mohammed Siraj (not out) 4 *(15b)*; Extras (lb-2, nb-4, w-5): 11; Total (in 119.3 overs): 369.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-8 (Rohit, 1.6 overs), 2-51 (Rahul, 14.6), 3-153 (Jaiswal, 40.6), 4-154 (Kohli, 42.1), 5-159 (Akash, 44.3), 6-191 (Pant, 55.4), 7-221 (Jadeja, 64.5), 8-348 (Washington, 111.6), 9-350 (Bumrah, 113.3).

AUSTRALIA BOWLING
Starc 25-2-86-0, Cummins 29-6-89-3, Boland 27-7-57-3, Lyon 28.3-4-96-3, Marsh 7-1-28-0, Head 3-0-11-0.

AUSTRALIA — 2ND INNINGS
Sam Konstas b Bumrah 8 *(18b, 1x4)*, Usman Khawaja b Siraj 21 *(65b, 2x4)*, Marnus Labuschagne lbw b Siraj 70 *(139b, 3x4)*, Steve Smith c Pant b Siraj 13 *(41b, 1x4)*, Travis Head c Nitish b Bumrah 1 *(2b)*, Mitchell Marsh c Pant b Bumrah 0 *(4b)*, Alex Carey b Bumrah 2 *(7b)*, Pat Cummins c Rohit b Jadeja 41 *(90b, 4x4)*, Mitchell Starc run out 5 *(13b)*, Nathan Lyon (batting) 41 *(54b, 5x4)*, Scott Boland (batting) 10 *(65b, 1x4)*; Extras (lb-9, nb-6, w-1): 16; Total (for nine wkts., in 82 overs): 228.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-20 (Konstas, 6.3), 2-43 (Khawaja, 18.5), 3-80 (Smith, 32.3), 4-85 (Head, 33.2), 5-85 (Marsh, 33.6), 6-91 (Carey, 35.6), 7-148 (Labuschagne, 55.1), 8-156 (Starc, 58.1), 9-173 (Cummins, 64.1).

INDIA BOWLING
Bumrah 24-7-56-4, Akash 17-4-53-0, Siraj 22-4-66-3, Jadeja 14-2-33-1, Nitish 1-0-4-0, Washington 4-0-7-0.

Precious Bumrah has to be looked after

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
MELBOURNE

Potency at the bowling crease yielding wickets and fresh statistical milestones, has been Jasprit Bumrah's consistent tale. Sunday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, was no exception.

With Bumrah being the prime disruptor of Australia's batting line-up, it was no surprise that Rohit Sharma kept using his spearhead often in the fourth Test.

Despite these recurring spells, the speedster ran in hard and eventually finished with a four for 56.

He now has 29 wickets in the current Border-Gavaskar Trophy series while second-placed Pat Cummins has 17. Importantly, Bumrah went past the 200-wicket mark in Tests. Travis Head was his 200th victim before Mitchell Marsh and Alex Carey emerged as his subsequent prey.

Fantastic figures

To have 202 scalps with a mind-boggling average of 19.52, economy of 2.76 and strike-rate of 42.42, places Bumrah in the realm of fast bowling excellence.

At 31, he has more years ahead. However, whether he can stretch himself thin across all three formats is something that the team-management, selectors and he have to decide.

India cannot afford a jaded Bumrah. He is precious.

Bumrah...202 and counting. AFP

Nitish is a man on a mission

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
MELBOURNE

An unmistakable confidence ripples through Nitish Kumar Reddy.

It was evident when he spoke to the media at the Melbourne Cricket Ground here on Sunday.

"I felt so happy about my first century. My father is here and I am representing the country and it's a special moment. I helped my team in a difficult situation," he said.

Amused and relieved with Mohammed Siraj surviving against Pat Cummins, Nitish said: "The crowd went crazy after Siraj's last-ball defence. Even for my century (the cheers) were not that loud. I loved the way Siraj approached the three balls and I should thank him."

All in: Nitish says he wants to prove his worth. AFP

Work in progress

Nitish's origin story has evoked curiosity but for him, this has been a work in progress: "For you guys, it's like one or two months. For me, I see my last three years, and about how hard I have worked on my batting and bowling. Fitness is important for me as an all-rounder. After my first IPL season, I worked a lot on my batting and that's helping now. I have to improve as a bowler."

Playing with his idol Virat Kohli is an obvious high: "I have been watching Virat from my childhood and to now play with him is special. He came to me and said that I played well and got the team back in the game and I felt so happy."

Grateful

Asked about his father Mutyala Reddy's contribution, Nitish got effusive: "When I was nothing, the first person who believed in me was my father. He resigned from his job, and took me to the ground, gym, and made a lot of sacrifices. I am grateful to have a father like him."

Humpy regains World Rapid crown

CHESS

Sports Bureau

Koneru Humpy regained the women's World Rapid chess championship after a gap of five years on Sunday.

The 37-year-old from Vijayawada finished with 8.5 points after beating Indonesia's Irene Sukandar in the final round in New York.

The victory helped Humpy move ahead of the other six joint leaders, including compatriot D. Harika, who had to settle for fifth place.

Among other Indian women, Divya Deshmukh (seven points) ended 21st, Padmini Rout (6.5) was 26th, R. Vaishali (5.5) 52nd and Vantika Agrawal (five) 67th.

Best on show: Murzin and Humpy strike a happy pose after sealing the Rapid titles. PTI

In the Open event, Russia's Volodar Murzin emerged the champion. The 18-year-old Russian finished with 10 points from 13 rounds. Alexander Grischuk and Ian Nepomniachtchi ensured it was a 1-2-3 for Russia, as they scored 9.5 points each.

Erigaisi fifth

The best Indian performer was Arjun Erigaisi, but it was a disappointing finish for him after starting the day as one of the joint leaders. He ended in fifth place with nine points.

Among the other Indians, R. Praggnanandhaa was 17th with 8.5 points. Arvindh Chithambaram (eight points) was 40th, V. Pranav (7.5) 44th and Raunak Sadhwani (seven) 55th.

The standings: 1. Volodar Murzin (Rus) 10 points; 2-3. Alexander Grischuk (Rus) and Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 9.5; 4-9. Leinier Dominguez Perez (USA), Arjun Erigaisi (Ind), Javokhir Sindarov (Uzb), Alireza Firouzja (Fra), Daniil Dubov (Rus) and Karen Grigoryan (Arm) 9.
Women: 1. Koneru Humpy (Ind) 8.5 points; 2-7. Ju Wenjun (Chn), Kateryna Lagno (Rus), Tan Zhongyi (Chn), D. Harika (Ind), Alexandra Kosteniuk (Swi) and Afruza Khamdamova (Uzb); 8-10. Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz), Irine Sukandar (Ina) and Stavroula Tsolakidou (Gre) 7.5.

'This title means a lot as I wasn't considered among the favourites'

P.K. Ajith Kumar

She was speaking from a distance of some 13,000 km. But, you could feel her excitement. And Koneru Humpy is not someone who usually gets excited easily by success.

But it was no ordinary success she attained on Sunday in New York. She won the women's World rapid chess championship after starting out as the 10th seed, and at the age of 37.

"Some of my opponents were half my age here in New York," Humpy told *The Hindu* over phone shortly after winning her second World rapid title (the first was in 2019). "So this title means quite a lot to me. I was seeded 10th and wasn't considered among the favourites."

Humpy, however, boarded the flight to New York with her eyes set firmly on the title.

"From my childhood, whenever I play in a tournament, my target has always been the first prize, and the second and third places don't matter to me much," said the 37-year-old from Vijayawada. "But here, I was off to a bad start, losing in the first round."

What hurt her most about the defeat to Amina Kairbekova of Kazakhstan was that she lost on time. "I was very disappointed that day and could not stop thinking about it till I went to bed," said Humpy. "That was because I had worked really hard on playing fast ahead of this tournament."

She had done it by playing a lot of games online. "That was how I trained for this championship, as I was working alone," she said. "After the opening day, my aim was to win three of my four games on the second day and would have taken a draw in the other, but I won all four."

So she went into the final day as a joint leader, and that was the case ahead of the last round. She was one of the seven leaders, but she moved ahead of the pack after defeating Indonesia's Irene Sukandar.

"The game was heading towards a draw, but she blundered," says Humpy. "So I was thus able to win the tournament as the clear first."

Last year, she had lost out on the title in the tie-breaker to Anastasia Bodnaruk of Russia. "I had been playing really well in that tournament," she said. "I was disappointed that I lost in the tie-breaks."

Now, she is looking forward to the World blitz championship, which opens on Monday.

INBRIEF

Man City beats Leicester to return to winning ways

Manchester City beat Leicester 2-0 in the Premier League on Sunday to notch up just its second win in 14 games in all competitions.

The results: Premier League: Leicester 0 lost to Manchester City 2 (Savinho 21, Haaland 74); Crystal Palace 2 (Chalobah 31, Eze 52) bt Southampton 1 (Dibling 14); Everton 0 lost to Nottingham Forest 2 (Wood 15, Gibbs-White 61); Fulham 2 (Jimenez 40, Wilson 72) drew with Bournemouth 2 (Evanilson 51, Ouattara 89); Tottenham 2 (Bentancur 12, Johnson 45+3) drew with Wolves 2 (Hwang 7, Strand Larsen 87).
Serie A: Napoli 1 (Raspadori 79) bt Venezia 0
On Saturday: Serie A: Cagliari 0 lost to Inter Milan 3 (Bastoni 54, Martinez 71, Calhanoglu 78-pen); Lazio 1 (Dele-Bashiru 27) drew with Atalanta 1 (Brescianini 88).

Shahidi slams unbeaten ton as batting marathon continues

Captain Hashmatullah Shahidi was unbeaten on 179 as Afghanistan trailed Zimbabwe by 71 runs after a rain-shortened fourth day of the first Test in Bulawayo on Sunday. He and double centurion Rahmat Shah put on 364 for the third wicket before the latter was out having made a career-best 234 at the Queens Sports Club.

The scores: Zimbabwe 586 in 135.2 overs vs Afghanistan 515/3 in 156 overs (Rahmat 234, Shahidi 179 batting, Afsar Zazai 46 batting).

Isaan's goal helps South United pip MEG & Centre

Isaan Sahi's 20th-minute goal proved the difference as South United FC beat MEG & Centre FC 1-0 in the BDFA Super Division League football on Sunday.

Ashi beats Anjum for rifle 3-position gold

Ashi Chouksey shot 466.7 in the final to beat Olympian Anjum Moudgil by 3.1 points in the women's 50-metre rifle 3-position event of the 67th National shooting championship at the Madhya Pradesh Academy, Bhopal, on Sunday.

The results: 50m rifle 3-position: Women: 1. Ashi Chouksey 466.7 (590); 2. Anjum Moudgil 463.6 (590); 3. Sakshi Padekar 451.3 (587).
Juniors: 1. Anushka Thokur 460.5 (580); 2. Sakshi Padekar 456.3 (587); 3. Nischal 443.9 (585).

LIVE TELECAST

New Zealand vs Sri Lanka: 2nd T20I, Sony Sports Ten 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, Prime Video, 11.45 a.m.
Zimbabwe vs Afghanistan: 1st Test, day 5, FanCode, 1.30 p.m.
ISL: Sports 18-3 (SD & HD) & JioCinema, 7.30 p.m.
Hockey: HIL, DD Sports, Sony Sports Ten 1, 2, 3 (SD & HD) & LIV, 8.15 p.m.
Serie A: gxr.world. 11 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Tuesday)

Youngsters help Bengal Tigers begin with win over Toofans

Jugraj, Sukhjeet and Yousuf find the target for the winner; Soorma edges past Dragons in shootout

HIL

Uthra Ganesan
ROURKELA

Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers had bet big on its young forwards while building the team and they did not disappoint as it began its Hockey India League (HIL) journey with a 3-2 win over Hyderabad Toofans on Sunday.

Erratic and inconsistent, Toofans was forced to play catch-up all through with the team appearing to be still finding its connections and rhythm. An early goal by Bengal Tigers, a penalty corner conversion by Jugraj Singh, helped the team settle and for large parts, it was clearly the better side on the field.

Toofans' trump card – Gonzalo Peillat, the most expensive overseas player at the auctions – had an off day, ineffective with his drag-flicks and out of form in the defence. Toofans earned nine penalty corners but could convert only one, a variation that saw Arthur de Sloover deflect Peillat's shot in the final minutes of the game.

On target: Jugraj opened the scoring for Bengal Tigers. M. VEDHAN

The Toofans defence, in fact, left a lot to be desired with huge gaps that were well exploited by the Bengal Tigers forwards.

Sukhjeet Singh did so in the 20th minute and an unmarked Affan Yousuf made it 3-0 for Bengal Tigers in the 36th, running in from the left and smashing in from the top of circle past goalkeeper Vikas Dahiya.

The Bengal Tigers defence was also effective in thwarting the few times Toofans managed to take a shot at the goal with Irish goalkeeper Jamie Carr bringing off some brilliant saves, including a couple of back-to-back ones and a penalty stroke from Maico Casella in the 24th minute.

The Toofans strikers barely managed to find openings and the one time they did, Rohit Singh's well-timed pass from the baseline was deflected in by Timothy Daniel for the team's first goal in the 41st minute. It wasn't enough.

Later, Soorma HC edged past Tamil Nadu Dragons in the shootout for its first point of the competition.

Led by two of India's best defenders in Harmanpreet Singh and Amit Rohidas, Soorma and Dragons respectively allowed little space inside the circle to the opposition.

The Australian frontline of Blake Govers, Nathan Ephraums and Tom Craig gave Dragons an edge but missed chances cost them.

Matched even and scoreless for most of the game, Dragons finally managed to get one through, Ephraums tapping in a rebound after Jip Janssen's shot was saved by goalkeeper Vincent Vanasch. Five minutes later, Soorma's fourth penalty corner saw Jeremy Hayward's shot deflected in by Gurjant Singh to level scores 1-1.

The results: Bengal Tigers 3 (Jugraj 9, Sukhjeet 20, Yousuf 36) bt Toofans 2 (Daniel 41, de Sloover 59); Soorma 1 (Gurjant 54) bt Dragons 1 (Ephraums 49) in shootouts.

Hemanth Muddappa.

Muddappa clinches three titles

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Hemanth Muddappa of Mantra Racing notched up a triple crown in the fourth and final round of the MMSC fmsci Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship at the Madras International Circuit (MIC) here on Sunday.

The results (Provisional, all 4-Stroke unless mentioned): Unrestricted: 1. Hemanth Muddappa (Mantra Racing) 7.837s; 2. S.P. Sugan Prasad (Mantra Racing) 7.970; 3. Khaja Awais Ahmed 8.060.

Rider champion: Muddappa; **Champion team:** Mantra Racing.

1051cc - 1650cc (Super Sport): 1. Mujahid Pasha (Fast Track Racing) 7.950; 2. Ayman Baig 8.169; 3. Alimon (Fast Track Racing) 8.288.

Rider champion: Muddappa; **Champion Team:** Fast Track Racing.

851cc - 1050cc (SS): 1. Muddappa 7.926; 2. Ahmed 8.126; 3. Sugan Prasad 8.196.

Rider champion: Muddappa; **Champion team:** Mantra Racing.

551cc - 850cc (SS): 1. Muddappa 8.275; 2. Mohammed Riyaz (Fast Track Racing) 8.275; 3. Altaf Khan (Fast Track Racing) 8.306. **Note:** Muddappa and Riyaz tied with same timing. Muddappa with a faster "Reaction Time" was placed first.

Rider champion: Mohammed Riyaz; **Champion Team:** Fast Track Racing.

361cc - 550cc (SS Indian): 1. Iqbal Sheik 11.281; 2. Shahrukh Khan (Mantra Racing) 11.599; 3. Naveed Ahmed 11.991.

Rider champion: Shahrukh Khan; **Team champion:** Mantra Racing.

166cc - 225cc (SS): 1. S. Prashanth 13.075; 2. K. Prashanth 13.395; 3. R. Shahinsha 13.582.

Rider champion: Prashanth.

Up to 165cc (SS Indian): 1. Mohan Babu (Rockers Racing) 13.541; 2. Iqbal Sheikh 13.656; 3. J. Bharathraj (Rockers Racing) 13.743.

Rider Champion: Bharathraj; **Champion team:** Rockers Racing.

The big prize: Steelers' balanced approach proved decisive. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Steelers down Pirates, take home the PKL title

Saikat Chakraborty
PUNE

Haryana Steelers emerged victorious in the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) Season 11 final, defeating Patna Pirates 32-23 here at the Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Balewadi on Sunday.

The encounter, billed as a clash between the league's strongest defence – Steelers – and the most potent attack – Pirates – lived up to the hype. However, it was the Steelers' balanced approach which ultimately proved decisive.

Shivam Patare, with a crucial nine points, spearheaded the offensive charge for Steelers, while its defence maintained a strong grip on the Pirates' raiders, led by the dynamic Iranian all-rounder Mohammadreza Chiyaneh Shadloui, who contributed seven points.

The first half was closely contested with Steelers holding a slight edge. However, a crucial all-out early in the second half put it firmly in control.

It was a disappointing night for Pirates.

Its attack, despite boasting the season's best raider Devank Dalal, struggled to find its rhythm, while its defence leaked points throughout the match. Only Gurdeep managed to win six tackle points.

This victory marks a significant milestone for coach Manpreet Singh, who finally tasted success after three previous final defeats.

Steelers' triumph also continues the recent trend of the league topper emerging the champion.

Bengal vs Kerala in Santosh Trophy final

Happy times: Bengal players celebrate after beating Services in the semifinals. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sports Bureau
HYDERABAD

Bengal knocked out defending champion Services 4-2 in the semifinals of the Santosh Trophy national football championship at the GMC Balayogi Stadium here on Sunday.

The record 32-time winner will take on Kerala in the title clash after it thrashed Manipur 5-1 in the second last-four match.

This is Bengal's 47th entry into the final. Services , which had won the title seven times, was on the back foot for much of the first half. It managed to score through Bikash Thapa and an own goal by Bengal defender Juwel Ahmed Mazumder, which added some suspense to the proceedings.

The defending champion seemed to lack a coherent strategy and struggled to penetrate the Bengal defence.

The result: Bengal 4 (Manotos Maji, 16, Robi Hansda, 45+2, 90+6, Naro Hari Shrestha, 45+4) bt Services 2 (Bikash Thapa, 53, Juwel Ahmed Mazumder 74-og).
Kerala 5 (Naseeb Rahman 22, Muhammad Ajsal 45+1, Muhammed Roshal P.P. 73, 88, 90+5) bt Manipur 1 (Shunjanthan Ragui 30).

Jamshedpur gets past Kerala Blasters

Sports Bureau

Jamshedpur FC beat Kerala Blasters FC 1-0 at the JRD Tata Sports Complex in the Indian Super League on Sunday.

A second-half strike by Pratik Chaudhari ensured that JFC FC broke the Kochi-based team's six-game-long unbeaten streak against it. The Men of Steel accordingly jumped four positions from the eighth place to the fourth spot in the standings, now boasting 21 points from 12 matches.

JFC found the eventual breakthrough from a powerful shot taken by defender Pratik in the 61st minute. KBFC made repeated attempts to clear a cross earned by the host but Pratik pounced upon a loose ball and netted it into the bottom left corner to score only his third-ever ISL goal.

The result: Jamshedpur FC 1 (Pratik 61) bt Kerala Blasters FC 0.

Syed Kirmani's autobiography *Stumped* launched

Star-studded affair: Kirmani's book launch was attended among others by Karnataka Deputy CM Shivakumar, Infosys co-chairman Narayanmurthy and a host of former cricketers. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sports Bureau
BENGALURU

A galaxy of stars descended at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Sunday for the launch of *Stumped* by Syed Kirmani, the autobiography of one of India's finest wicketkeepers. The book is co-authored by Debashish Sengupta and Dakshesh Pathak.

The cricket universe was represented by Kapil Dev, Rahul Dravid, V.V.S. Laxman, Anil Kumble, Brijesh Patel, E.A.S. Prasanna, B.S. Chandrasekhar and many of Kirmani's State teammates. Infosys co-founder N.R. Narayana Murthy and Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar were also in attendance.

Former cricketer Sunil Gavaskar, badminton stalwart Prakash Padukone and actor Jackie Shroff sent their well wishes through video messages.

Kirmani's famous partnership with Kapil Dev against Zimbabwe in the 1983 World Cup, where the duo rescued India from a precarious 17 for five, was a favourite memory among speakers on the stage.

Kapil spoke about the first time he met Kirmani, who incidentally celebrated his 75th birthday on Sunday.

"I was in an under-19 camp when Syed Kirmani, Bishan Singh Bedi and others returned to India after being bloodied and bruised on a tour to West Indies. I worked up the courage to approach Kirmani. The first autograph I ever received in my life was from the great 'Kiri bhai' and G.R. Viswanath," Kapil said. "I remember what Kirmani wrote when signing the autograph. He wrote 'Hope to see tons of runs and tons of wickets from you'. That was most kind of him. I also spent a few hours with him, where he taught me so much about the sport and beyond," Kapil said.

Kenaf should come good in Bonzer Cup

HYDERABAD: The four-year-old filly Kenaf, who ran third in her last outing, should make amends in the Bonzer Cup, the main event of Monday's (Dec. 30) races.

1 GANGOTRI PLATE (DIV. II) (1,200M), rated up to 25 (Cat. III), 1.50 p.m.: 1. Club Queen (2) R.S. Jodha 62, 2. Golden Unicorn (1) Ajay K 62, 3. Most Beautiful (6) Shivansh 62, 4. Hoping Wind (4) Mohit 61.5, 5. Smart Boy (3) B.R. Kumar 61, 6. Anahita (8) R.S. Bhati 60, 7. Bien Pensant (5) Surya Prakash 55.5 and 8. Protocol (7) B. Nikhil 51.5.
1. CLUB QUEEN, 2. HOPING WIND, 3. ANAHITA

2 GANGOTRI PLATE (DIV. I) (1,200M), 3-y-o and upward, rated up to 25 (Cat. III), 2.25: 1. Amboseli (4) Mukesh 62, 2. Desert Sultan (1) A.A. Vikrant 62, 3. Hoping Queen (3) Mohit 62, 4. Swiss Girl (6) Deepak 62, 5. Secret Option (5) H.M. Akshay 61.5, 6. My Brother (8) R.S. Jodha 61, 7. Arnaz (2) Gaurav 58.5, 8. Blue Brigade (–) and 9. Zidane (7) Surya Prakash 50.
1. SECRET OPTION, 2. AMBOSELI, 3. SWISS GIRL

3 WISHFUL THINKING PLATE (DIV. II) (1,200M), 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 3.00: 1. Fara (1) H.M. Akshay 60, 2. Colt Pistol (2) Mukesh 59.5, 3. N R I Dheera (5) Kuldeep Sr. 59, 4. Gifted Girl (3) Deepak 57.5, 5. Classy Dame (4) R.S. Jodha 56.5, 6. Eminency (9) Nakhat 56, 7. Dali's Champion (7) Ajay K 55.5, 8. Star Medal (8) Md. Ekram 55 and 9. Tupac (6) Kuldeep Jr. 51.5.
1. DALI'S CHAMPION, 2. N R I DHEERA, 3. FARA

4 TWIN STAR CUP (1,400m), 3-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 3.35: 1. Nonpariel (7) B.R. Kumar 60.5, 2. Gloria (1) Ashad Asbar 59.5, 3. My Challenge (8) Akshay K 58.5, 4. Tiger Ruby (2) Uday Kiran 57, 5. The Pious (10) Mukesh 53, 6. Pancho (6) B. Nikhil 52.5, 7. Ilene (4) Abhay Singh 51.5, 8. Splendour On Grass (3) G. Naresh 51, 9. Varaneek Gold (5) H.M. Akshay 51 and 10. Talking Stick (9) Ajay K 50.
1. MY CHALLENGE, 2. GLORIA, 3. TIGER RUBY

5 BONZER CUP (1,200M), 3-y-o and upward, rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II), 4.10: 1. Kenaf (3) Akshay K 61.5, 2. Shadow Fax (2) Santosh Raj 57.5, 3. Rival (4) P. Sai K 55.5, 4. Happy Soul (5) Kuldeep Jr. 54, 5. First Class (6) Mukesh 53.5, 6. Lady Danger (7) B. Nikhil 53, 7. Wind Sprite (1) Afroz K 53 and 8. Santa Barbara (8) Surya Prakash 52.5.
1. KENAF, 2. SHADOW FAX, 3. FIRST CLASS

6 WISHFUL THINKING PLATE (DIV. I) (1,200M), 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 4.45: 1. Only The Brave (2) Shivansh 60, 2. Planet Super (7) Ajay K 59, 3. Hoping Star (4) Mohit 58.5, 4. Great Giver (9) Kuldeep Jr. 57, 5. Flashing Memories (1) Nakhat 56, 6. Morning Mist (3) Deepak 56, 7. Glimmer Of Hope (5) Gaurav 53, 8. Catchme If You Can (10) Mukesh 51, 9. Exponent (6) Md. Ekram 51 and 10. Battle On (8) P. Sai K 50.5.
1. GREAT GIVER, 2. PLANET SUPER, 3. EXPONENT
Day's best: **KENAF**
Jackpot: 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6.
Mini Jackpot: 3, 4, 5 & 6.
Treble: (i) 1, 2 & 3, (ii) 4, 5 & 6.
Tanala: All races.

Northern Waves reigns

HYDERABAD: Trainer G. Shashikanth's two year old filly Northern Waves, ridden by Mukesh Kumar, claimed the Godolphin Barb Million, the main attraction of Sunday's (Dec. 29) races. The winner is owned by Mr. V. Narendar Reddy.

1. DILAGE PLATE (DIV. I) (1,200M): KNIGHT CRUSADER (Imran Chisty) 1, Linda (Ashad Asbar) 2, Peanut (Mukesh) 3 and Cherish The Lady (Ajay K) 4. 3-3/4, 2 and 1-1/2. 1m, 11.58s. ₹12 (w), 10, 10 and 14 (p). SHP: 24, THP: 25, SHW: 10 and 23, FP: 26, Q: 27, Tanala: 40. Favourite: Knight Crusader. Owner: Mr. C. Aryama Sundaram. Trainer: N. Ravinder Singh.

2. DILAGE PLATE (DIV. II) (1,200M): NEWFOUND GLORY (P. Sai Kumar) 1, Bellingham (B.R. Kumar) 2, N R I Star (Santosh Raj) 3 and Shoolin (B. Nikhil) 4. Not run: Jolly Jester. 2-1/4, 6-1/4 and 2. 1m, 13.45s. ₹18 (w), 10, 10 and 23 (p). SHP: 40, THP: 61, SHW: 10 and 36, FP: 56, Q: 40, Tanala: 289. Favourite: Newfound Glory. Owners: Mr. K. Mallikarjuna Rao & M/s. The United Racing & Bloodstock Breeders Ltd. Trainer: K.S.V. Prasad Raju.

3. DILAGE PLATE (DIV. III) (1,200M): DIABLO (P. Sai Kumar) 1, Rolls Royce (Md. Ekram) 2, Shooting Star (Abhay Singh) 3 and That's My Mission (Mukesh) 4. 1-1/4, 2 and 1-1/4. 1m, 12.46s. ₹40 (w), 10, 11 and 11 (p). SHP: 28, THP: 37, SHW: 30 and 15, FP: 86, Q: 51, Tanala: 270. Favourite: Rolls Royce. Owners: M/s. Ashok Ranpise, Seshadri Reddy Pochana, Mr. Teegala Sumant Reddy, Teegala Vijender Reddy, Satish Kumar Reddy Poondla, Giri Prathamesh Mahadev, Bollineni Krishnaiah & Mr. Teja Gollapudi. Trainer: K.S.V. Prasad Raju.

4. G. VASUDEV REDDY MEMORIAL CUP (1,400M): DARLING'S BOY (Kuldeep Jr.) 1, Kalki (Alex) 2, Espionage (Kuldeep Sr.) 3 and Star Forever (G. Naresh) 4. Not run: Burgundy Black and Hurricane Wave. 1/2, 1/2 and 3/4. 1m, 25.21s. ₹164 (w), 40, 13 and 10 (p). SHP: 36, THP: 71, SHW: 108 and 26, FP: 788, Q: 211, Tanala: 1,410. Favourite: Espionage. Owners: Mr. S. Daljeet Singh, Mr. Mohammed Rashed Ali Khan & Mr. Aziz Ahmed Khan. Trainer: M.F. Ali Khan.

5. KASU BRAHMANANDA REDDY MEMORIAL CUP (2,000M): BROOKLYN BEAUTY (G. Naresh) 1, Nightmare (B.R. Kumar) 2, Barbet (Mukesh) 3 and Fly Tothe Stars (Afroz K) 4. 1-1/4, 2-1/2 and Head. 2m, 5.55s. ₹315 (w), 68, 16 and 15 (p). SHP: 36, THP: 40, SHW: 99 and 32, FP: 1,732, Q: 637, Tanala: 5,596. Favourite: King Immortal. Owner: Mr. Mohammed Kashif Ali Khan. Trainer: N. Ravinder Singh.
NOTE: *First favourite King Immortal (I. Chisty up) stopped galloping after passing 1800m and did not participate further, while Painted Apache (H.M. Akshay astride) broke down near the 400m.*

6. GODOLPHIN BARB MILLION (1,400M): NORTHERN WAVES (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Ayushman (Kuldeep Sr.) 2, Mystical Dawn (Ashad Asbar) 3 and Brilliant Lad (Suraj Narredu) 4. 4-1/2, Neck and 1. 1m, 25.56s. ₹50 (w), 10, 26 and 15 (p). SHP: 42, THP: 47, SHW: 26 and 40, FP: 767, Q: 323, Tanala: 4,048. Favourite: Brilliant Lad. Owner: Mr. V. Narendar Reddy. Trainer: G. Shashikanth.

7. AUXILIARY PLATE (1,600M): JUST INCREDIBLE (Kuldeep Singh Sr.) 1, Shah Of Iran (Md. Ismail) 2, See My Attitude (Afroz K) 3 and Quality Warrior (Shivansh) 4. Not run: London Bell. 1-1/2, 3 and 3/4. 1m, 39.73s. ₹23 (w), 10, 19 and 19 (p). SHP: 52, THP: 58, SHW: 11 and 59, FP: 226, Q: 120, Tanala: 1,115. Favourite: Just Incredible. Owners: Mr. Ashok Rupani & Mr. Sunder Peshwani. Trainer: S. Sreekant.
Jackpot: 100%: ₹2,76,119 (c/o).
Mini Jackpot: (i) 1,672 (27 tkts.), (ii) 41,262 (c/o).
Treble: (i) 2,808 (7 tkts.), (ii) 36,849 (1 tkt.).